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Underhill, Evelyn

*the* **EVELYN UNDERHILL READER**

Compiled by

**THOMAS S. KEPLER**

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**THE EVELYN UNDERHILL READER**

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**TO HELEN AND BOB BELL**

## *Preface*

After the death of Evelyn Underhill on June 15, 1941, a memorial service was held for her in the chapel at Pleshey, where she had held many retreats. At the service this prayer was offered:

O God, who by the lives of those who love Thee dost  
refashion the souls of men,  
We give Thee thanks for the ministry of Thy servant Evelyn;  
In whose life and words Thy love and majesty were made known to us,  
Whose loving spirit set our spirits on fire,  
Who learnt from Thee the Shepherd's care for His sheep;  
Grant that some measure of the Spirit which she received  
from Thee may fall on us who loved her.  
We ask it for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Evelyn Underhill wrote or edited thirty-seven books, and for those who did not know her personally her writings have radiated one "whose spirit sets our spirits on fire." No woman in Christian history has written more on the meaning and value of Christian mysticism; and few have been able to interpret the meaning of mysticism in terms of practical, everyday living in a deeper fashion. The purpose of this collection of her writings is twofold: (1) to give to the readers an insight into her radiant spirit and penetrating mind; (2) to bring to the readers her ideas which will help them to interpret vital Christianity for their contemporary living. Although she was better known in England than in the United States, it is my hope that this volume will acquaint people everywhere more carefully with her viewpoints, which have so much of solidity and depth for a Christian way of living today.

THOMAS S. KEPLER



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## *Introduction*

### LIFE OF EVELYN UNDERHILL

Evelyn Underhill was born on December 6, 1875, at Wolverhampton, England, into a fairly wealthy Tory home. Her father was a lawyer and a barrister who was knighted as Sir Arthur Underhill. It seems odd that one who in her maturing years did so much for religion and who became a staunch member of the Church of England should be brought up in a home where religion played such a small part. "I wasn't brought up to religion," was the way she described her early religious training. Her home was one, however, of solid values and interests, where numerous adventures in sailing, a substantial home library, and travels to Europe with her mother every year from 1898 to 1913 knit her to a family spirit and gave her widened interests. It was through yachting, her father's chief hobby, that she deepened friendship with her husband-to-be, Hubert Stuart Moore, when the Moore and the Underhill families shared sea companionship. Along with the stimulations of their home life, her parents gave her much freedom, which partially accounts for her many wide interests in cats, sailing, book-binding, archaeology, bicycling, flowers, birds, gardening.

At the age of ten she went away to boarding school; was a student at a private school at Folkestone, 1888-91; and attended King's College for Women in London, where she spread her interests widely in studying languages, philosophy, history, botany, and social sciences. In 1928 she was made a Fellow of King's College; and in 1938 Aberdeen University conferred upon her the degree of Doctor of Divinity, though because of ill health she was not able to receive the degree in person. She became the only woman to be chosen by any Oxford college as an outside lecturer on religion. Though Evelyn Underhill will best be remembered by her writings, she was a person whose energies were related to many interests during the active years of her life. She was a member of COPEC (Conference on Politics, Economics, and Christianity); she joined the Committee of the Religious Thought Society; during World War I she was in Naval Intel-



ligence (Africa), making translations and guidebooks; she gave the Upton Lectures at Manchester College, Oxford, in 1921; she was theological editor of *Spectator*, and later did editorial work for *Time and Tide*; she wrote widely for magazines, such as *The Challenge* and *Hibbert Journal*; she joined a lay order of contemplatives living in the world, the Order of the Holy Dove; her chief work in later years was related to retreats, especially at her beloved Pleshey, but also at Moreton, Saint Leonard's, Canterbury, Leiston Abbey, Watermillock, and Glastonbury. Her life was a living parable of *practical* mysticism, for to her the life of a religious person was not one estranged in a monastery, but one concerned with the problems of everyday living, especially with the poor, to which she gave during a portion of her life two afternoons a week by working in the slums at North Kensington.

It was not by an easy path that Evelyn Underhill arrived at her tenets of religious thought. Not "brought up to religion" in her home as a child, she tells us that as she went away to school religion meant little to her, and that she was glad to be rid of it. But something apparently was occurring within her emerging spirit, for on March 11, 1891, at the age of fifteen she was confirmed at Christ Church, Folkestone; and she made her first Communion that year at St. Paul's, Sandgate, on Easter Sunday. The next year in her "black book" on December 5, 1892, we have an insight into her religious moorings:

As to religion, I don't quite know, except that I believe in a God, and think it is better to love and to help the poor people round me than to go on saying that I love an abstract Spirit whom I have never seen. If I can do both, all the better, but it is best to begin with the nearest. I do not think anything is gained by being orthodox, and a great deal of the beauty and the sweetness of things is lost by being bigoted and dogmatic. If we are to see God at all it must be through nature and our fellow men. Science holds a lamp up to heaven, not down to the Churches. I don't believe in worrying God with prayers for things we want. If He is omnipotent He knows we want them, and if He isn't, He can't give them to us. I think it is an insult to Him to repeat the same prayers every day. It is as much to say He is deaf, or very slow of comprehension. I do not believe the Bible is inspired, but I think nevertheless that it is one of the best and wisest books the world has ever seen.<sup>1</sup>

Then she says further: "When I grow up I should like to be an author because you can influence people more widely by books than by

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Cropper, *Life of Evelyn Underhill* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), pp. 5, 6.

## INTRODUCTION

pictures . . . Goodbye sixteen years old. I hope my mind will not grow tall to look down on things, but wide to embrace all sorts of things in the coming year." <sup>2</sup>

Just when Evelyn Underhill began to find interest in the mystics and to penetrate more deeply into religious truth it is hard to say. Perhaps it was the J. H. Herbert family, who were loyal Roman Catholics (he being the keeper of the manuscripts in the British Museum), who encouraged her to study the medieval stories of the Virgin and perhaps to probe more deeply into the meaning of the Roman Catholic Church. Undoubtedly her travels into Italy and other parts of Europe set her mind to pondering the great saintly persons. From her experience in the Spanish chapel in Sta. Maria Novella we find the record in her diary: "I could have lingered there for hours. It was so peaceful, so filled with the best mediaeval spirit, learned yet pious, stern but loving." After being in a Florentine art gallery she wrote: "This place has taught me more than I can tell you: a sort of gradual unconscious growing into an understanding of things." Of Assisi, the home of St. Francis, she recorded in her diary: "Assisi is well called La Beata for its soul is more manifest than any other city that I have ever known. There is something in the quiet spaces of her streets, in the wonderful way in which she hangs on the slope of the mountain, and turns a sheer face to look out over the valley, in the contrast of her pale but warm stones with the prevailing blues and greens of Umbria, which very perfectly expresses the heart of Italy. I think after careful consideration that St. Francis must rank with Our Lady of Chartres as one of the two most beautiful churches that I have seen."

About this time we find her giving a set of books to a friend for religious reading which included *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, *L'Ornement des Noces Spirituelles* by Ruysbroeck, *Theologia Germanica*, *Revelations of Divine Love* by Lady Julian, *The Soul of a Christian* by Granger, *The Soul's Orbit* by Maud Petre, *Oil and Wine* and *Lex Credendi* by George Tyrrell, *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower* by Coventry Patmore. These books, mainly Roman Catholic volumes, indicate the trend in which Evelyn Underhill's mind was moving. Yet there were factors which kept her from becoming a member of the Roman Catholic Church: (1) the inclinations of her husband-to-be, Hubert Moore; (2) the Modernist controversy of 1907. After visiting for a short time at the convent of Perpetual

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Adoration she found herself almost submitting to the Roman Catholic Church, convinced that "the Catholic religion was true. It was so tightly bound up with Roman Catholicism that I had no doubt that the Church was my ultimate home." And yet there lurked a problem, as she further wrote to Father Robert Hugh Benson:

I have got half-way from agnosticism to Catholicism, and seem unable to get any farther. . . . As I understand the matter, before one can become a Catholic, and for me Catholicism is the only possible organized faith, one must get into the state of mind which ignores all the results of the study of comparative religions, and accepts, for instance, the Ascension, in as literal and concrete spirit as the Spanish Armada. Is this not so? . . . What ought I to do? It would I am sure be many months before I could take any definite step—but if you would help me, and tell me where I have been wrong, I should be truly and deeply grateful.<sup>a</sup>

A few weeks later after further correspondence with Father Benson she wrote: "After Holy Week, and much time given to considering the question, I felt practically certain that I must eventually become a Catholic if I were to be true to my convictions."

In telling her future husband, Hubert Moore, of her intentions to become a Roman Catholic, she found resistance upon his part, especially because of the problem of the confessional, where he felt that the secrets belonging to husband and wife would be laid out in the open before the priest-confessee: "He insists," she told Father Benson, "that all hope of our happiness is at an end, that he could never trust me, no more mutual confidence possible, that there will always be a priest between us." She agreed with Hubert Moore that she would wait a year before making her decision to join the Roman Catholic Church.

She was married to Hubert Moore on July 3, 1907, with a Mass being said for her by Father Benson, and a letter coming to her from Father Benson with these words: "You are not yet certain of the Catholic position, and that the Church is not yet plain to you. That being so, let me congratulate you on your marriage, and wish you every conceivable happiness—above all, the happiness of receiving the full gift of faith." In September of that year, 1907, the papal encyclical of Pius X, *Pascendi gregis*, was issued against Modernism, which involved great scholars like Alfred Loisy, Abbé Duchesne, George Tyrrell, Baron Friedrich von Hügel. Men like Loisy and

<sup>a</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 30.



## INTRODUCTION

Duchesne were special targets of attack; George Tyrrell was excommunicated for his attacks of Pius X regarding hell; Modernism was called "the heresies of all heresies." Evelyn Underhill could not submit to the premises involved in the papal attack against Modernism. To a friend she stated her position: "Unfortunately I allowed myself to wait a year before being received, and meanwhile the modernist storm broke. Being myself Modernist on many points, I can't get in without suppression and evasions to which I can't bring myself." Thus she found herself a woman without a spiritual country. "To have any dealings with Anglicanism [in which she had been baptized] seems to me a kind of treachery." Yet she continued going to Mass, being denied the sacraments.

Up to this time Evelyn Underhill had written four books, *A Bar-Lamb's Ballad Book* (1902), *The Grey World* (1904), *The Miracle of Our Lady St. Mary* (1905), and *The Lost Word* (1907). But she had now begun to gather materials and to saturate herself for her first major book on religion, *Mysticism*, which was published in the spring of 1911. It carried the subtitle: *A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*. Her main emphasis lay in the fact that mysticism does not involve a flight of the individual away from the world, but an activity with God laboring for the kingdom of heaven. It was an *ethical mysticism*. Not only was her book widely acclaimed and warmly received; it also did something epochal in her life, for it brought her into her initial relationship with Baron Friedrich von Hügel, with whom she found close friendship until his death in 1925, and under whose guidance as her spiritual director the last five years of his life she developed a deepening understanding of the meaning of mysticism. To a friend she said of Baron von Hügel: "Under God, I owe him my whole spiritual life, and there would have been more of it than there is, if I had been more courageous and stern with myself, and followed his directions more thoroughly."

Out of her correspondence with Baron von Hügel, several problems are discovered which seem to be at the heart of Evelyn Underhill's thinking, and which portray the trends of her spiritual growth: (1) Christocentric thinking as compared with theocentric thought; (2) the difficulty of becoming a practicing Roman Catholic; (3) the reality of the historical happenings of the New Testament; (4) the forming of a set of spiritual disciplines. Though she claimed that she was "clinging to St. Paul," she also said:

Christocentric devotion. This is still a difficulty. And yet the average Christian appears by declaration to do it naturally and instinctively. Yet I

really am a Christian—at least I believe so—though in a modernist rather than strict orthodox sense. But God seems to me the only and inevitable Object of adoration and, anyhow, all that I know at first hand.<sup>4</sup>

By the summer of 1922 she wrote to the Baron: "I was beginning to be faintly Christocentric then, but it spoilt my communions, and I dreaded times of prayer—they meant dimness, incapacity, pain and horrible remorse. . . . I am still mainly theocentric; but the two attitudes [that is, Christocentric and theocentric] are no longer in opposition in my mind; they are two aspects of one thing." By June, 1923, she reported to Baron von Hügel: "The Christocentric side has become so much deeper and stronger—it nearly predominates." About 1927, in looking back over her experiences she wrote:

Until about five years ago I had never had *any* personal experience of our Lord. I didn't know what it meant. I was a convinced Theocentric, thought Christocentric language and practice sentimental and superstitious, and was very handy to shallow psychological explanations of it. I had, from time to time, what seemed to be visible experiences of God, from the time of my conversion from agnosticism (about twenty years ago now). This position I thought to be that of a broad-minded and intelligent Christian, but when I went to the Baron [in 1921] he said I wasn't much better than a Unitarian! Somehow by his prayers or something he *compelled* me to experience Christ.<sup>5</sup>

In 1932 she wrote to a friend who has suggested that a chapter of a book have more about the adoration of God through Christ:

I'm so instinctively pulled to the theocentric side, and my soul goes off so naturally in that direction when left to itself, that anything I do, try to do, is sure to be thin on the Christocentric side. And yet, just because this book is so personal, I felt rather reluctant to alter it much. *You see I come to Christ through God*, whereas obviously lots of people come to God through Christ. But I can't show them how to do it. All I know is the reverse route.<sup>6</sup>

(2) Although Evelyn Underhill had been baptized and confirmed in the Anglican Church in March, 1891, at the age of fifteen, she never seemed to have found herself a staunch practicing devotee of that branch of the Christian faith. After the Modernist controversy of

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 73, 74.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Williams (ed.), *The Letters of Evelyn Underhill* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1943), pp. 205, 206.



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1907 she felt it "treachery" to become activated in the Anglican Church, yet she could not accept the intellectual aspects of the Roman Catholic Church and was denied its sacraments.

In her Upton Lectures given at Manchester College, Oxford, in 1921, she said this about the church and a person's relationship to it:

A Church has something to give to and something to demand from each of its members, and there is a genuine loss for man in being unchurched. . . . When once the historical character of reality is fully grasped by us, we see that some such organization through which achieved values are conserved and carried forward, useful habits are learned and practised, the direct intuitions of genius, the prophet's revelation of reality are interpreted and handed on, is essential to the spiritual continuity of the race: and that definite churchmanship of some sort or its equivalent, must be a factor in the spiritual reconstruction of society.<sup>7</sup>

By 1921 Evelyn Underhill had become a practicing member of the Church of England, though it is probable that at first she entered this fellowship with not too great enthusiasm. But in that church she remained and served her fellow men. Writing to Dom John Chapman on June 9, 1931, she expressed her attitude toward the Anglican Church:

I solidly believe in the Catholic status of the Anglican Church, as to orders and sacraments, little as I appreciate many of the things done among us. . . . The whole point to me is that our Lord has put me *here*, keeps on giving me more and more jobs to do for souls here, and has never given me orders to move. . . . I know what the push of God is like, and should obey it if it came—at least I trust and believe so.<sup>8</sup>

(3) The problem of relating the subjective experience of the Christian mystic to the historical facts of the Christian faith seemed a harassing problem for Evelyn Underhill, and one which her director helped her to get into proper focus. Bothered by the problem of accepting the "impossible" historical items of the Christian story, she saw the way of the mystic as the real clue to an authoritative knowledge of God. It was, however, her conversations with Baron von Hügel which convinced her that the transcendental, the incarnational, and the institutional cannot be omitted in the total Christian appreciation of reality. In her earlier spiritual moorings there was the danger

<sup>7</sup> *The Life of the Spirit and the Life of To-day* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd.), pp. 128, 129.

<sup>8</sup> Cropper, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

that she interpret the mysteries of the church and many of the historical events about Jesus Christ as purely symbolical and not as real historical occurrences. Whatever might have been her final outcome in balancing the subjective experiences of a Christian soul with the objective and real events of the Christian epic, there is undoubtedly a great influence of Baron von Hügel upon Evelyn Underhill in seeing the interrelationship of these two aspects of a total religious pilgrimage. She was thus able to write in 1921: "The mystic sense flies straight to God and *thinks* it finds all its delight in him alone.' But a careful examination always discovers many sensible, institutional, and historical contributions to this supposed ineffable experience."

In writing to Evelyn Underhill about her Upton Lectures, the Baron commented in October, 1921, upon this development: "It is excellent news that, preparing one of these addresses for Manchester College, Oxford, you found you had really come out strongly and self-committingly for Traditional, Institutional, Sacramental Religion."

In the summer of 1922, in making a report to her director Baron von Hügel, she states her position clearly regarding the historical values of religion:

Yes! I now fully and solidly accept your position, with no reserves at all; and with a growing feeling in favour of such historical realism, and dislike of fluffy and notional, instead of factual religion. You forced me thoroughly to reconsider my own foundations and realize that a merely philosophy of values, however sublime, has no power to redeem unless these values have been incarnated into human life. The main historical happenings as given by reasonable New Testament criticism—and especially the Passion—are absolutely necessary to Christianity as I understand it.<sup>9</sup>

Undoubtedly the Baron's advice to her "that the Church came first and the mystics, afterwards" became the foundation thought of her practical mysticism.

That Evelyn Underhill had "grown" greatly in her relating the historical to the mysticism is indicated in the words of Bishop Lumsden Barkway:

When one compares *Worship* (1936) with *Mysticism* (1911), the chief book of her earlier period, then the immense change of emphasis which

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.



## INTRODUCTION

has taken place in the intervening years is immediately obvious. The latter book is predominantly incarnational, institutional, and sacramental. The words used are different; for example, the word "reality" which occurs so frequently in her first books is almost entirely absent. There is less stress on mysticism. It is strange to notice that the word is not to be found in the index, nor the word "contemplation." To a youthful reader the style of the book may seem flat compared with the earlier; but its deeper maturity makes this authoritative statement of her final point of view much sounder exposition of the fundamental facts of life and religion. When one compares her study of the Gospels in *The Mystic Way* with her discussion of the doctrine of the Incarnation in *Worship*, the contrast shows how immensely she had grown in wisdom and spiritual insight.<sup>10</sup>

(4) The problem of spiritual discipline seemed to be a concern for Evelyn Underhill in her early years. At fifteen she listed her nineteen faults, which she hoped to overcome: "Selfishness; pride; conceit; disorder; moral cowardice; self-deceit; scepticism; thoughtlessness; revengefulness; exaggeration; want of truth; changeable; double-dealing; teasing; unkindness; disobedience [sic]; dishonorableness; profanity; idleness." Perhaps at this early age she was too introspective and too self-analytical. When Baron von Hügel became her spiritual adviser, he told her that she was too much concerned in her attendance of the state of her own soul. We find her under his direction putting concentration in her disciplines on God, Christ, and the poor. In her *My Rule* in 1921 she writes:

Invisible religion shall be the touchstone for all external practices, which should in the long run steady and feed it. Those that disturb it to be discarded. Get gently interested in the poor. Two afternoons weekly to be given to this and take priority of everything else except strictly family duties. This work must be entered into and persevered with, with the object of developing more homely and human religious dispositions: and the spirit derived from it spread over the whole week. Aim at a reasonable devotedness as well as devotion with sufficient variety and no feverishness: above all much self-oblivion: dropping introspection and thoughts of self and turning to thoughts and acts for others; humble aspirations to God.<sup>11</sup>

Regarding times for prayer she writes:

A fixed time must be given daily to deliberate prayer: but it must not be long or very much altered, as to time, whether in consolation or desolation. The kind and degree shall be that which most helps to love, work

<sup>10</sup> Lucy Menzies (ed.), *Collected Papers of Evelyn Underhill* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1946), pp. 16, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Cropper, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

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and suffer, and both humbles and braces. But the spirit of inarticulate prayer should more and more penetrate all working hours.<sup>12</sup>

In her later writings we find her evaluation of prayer to a group of clergy:

A priest's life of prayer is, in a peculiar sense, part of the great mystery of the Incarnation. He is meant to be one of the channels, by and through which the Eternal God, manifested in time, acts within the human world, reaches out, seeks, touches and transforms human souls. His real position in the parish is that of a dedicated agent of the Divine Love. The Spirit of Christ, indirectly in his Church, is to act through him.<sup>13</sup>

In one of her last writings she well summarizes her attitude toward prayer and worship, with its practical effect upon the life of a community:

In the days that are coming, I am sure that Christianity will have to move out from the churches and the chapels, or rather spread out far beyond the devotional focus of its life, and justify its existence, beautifying and enriching all levels of being, physical, social, and mental, as well as spiritual, telling the truth about God and Man, casting its transfiguring radiance on the whole of that world in which man has to live. It must in fact have the courage to apply its own inherent Sacramentarianism, without limitation, to the whole mixed experience of humanity, and in the light of this interpretation show me the way out of their confusions, miseries, and sins. Only those who have learned to look at the Eternal with the disinterested loving gaze, the objective unpossessive delight of Worship, who do see the stuff of common life with the shining through it, will be able to do that. The Spirit of Worship is the very spirit of Exploration. It has never finished discovering and adoring the new perfection of that which it loves.<sup>14</sup>

The later years of Evelyn Underhill were ones mingled with suffering and accomplishments—the physical suffering due to asthma and the mental anguish caused by war. Transcending her suffering, she gave her time to the leading of retreats and to her writing. Reversing her position from World War I, she found herself an ardent pacifist in World War II. Writing in a pamphlet called *The Church and War* for the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship, she said: "If she remains true to her supernatural call, the Church cannot acquiesce in war." For

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83, 84.

<sup>13</sup> Menzies, (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>14</sup> Cropper, pp. 204, 205.

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the Fellowship of Reconciliation she wrote in a *Meditation of Peace*, "The true pacifist is a redeemer, and must accept with joy the redeemer's lot. He, too, is self-offered, without conditions, for the peace of the world."

Accomplishments came also in her later years. Aberdeen University voted her a Doctor of Divinity in 1938; her book *Worship* (1937) was chosen Religious Book of the Month in America; *The Spiritual Life* (1937), *The Mystery of Sacrifice* (1938), and *Abba* (1940) were well received. She wrote letters of spiritual guidance to many friends. To a prayer group she wrote letters on the great feast days of the church, published after her death as *The Fruits of the Spirit* (1942). But her spirit quietly waned and death came to her on June 15, 1941. She was buried in the churchyard of St. John's Parish Church, Hampstead. As one said of her, "She was a gateway to God"; she will continue in this role for many who will know her through the inspiration of her writings.

## WRITINGS OF EVELYN UNDERHILL

Evelyn Underhill was a prodigious author, writing and editing thirty-seven books, besides composing numerous articles for magazines, and, in 1932, a scholarly article on "Medieval Mysticism" for the Cambridge Medieval History, Volume VII. Two of her volumes are poems: *Immanence: A Book of Verses* (1912) and *Theophanies* (1916). Two of her books are written under the pseudonym of "John Cordelier": *Path of the Eternal Wisdom* (1912) and *The Spiral Way* (1912). Her prose can be classified into two groups: (1) translations and critical editions; (2) devotional books that explain religion and guide the reader along the religious pathway. In 1892 as a young girl of seventeen she won first prize in a short story competition in the magazine *Hearth and Home*. On December 5, 1891, she told of her ambition to be a writer: "My favourite occupations are literature and art, though I do not think that I have much taste for the latter. When I grow up I should like to be an author because you can influence people more widely by books than by pictures." At this time we find that her "favourite prose writers are Matthew Arnold, Hallam, and Huxley for their style, Carlyle for his philosophy, Besant for his characters. Amongst the poets I prefer Shakespeare for general excellence, Milton for majesty, Tennyson and Keats for beautiful thoughts, musically set, and Calverley and Austin Dobson for *vers de société*."

The style and language of Evelyn Underhill are clear, graphic, understandable, easy to interpret by the average reader, yet clothed with a depth which makes the more learned appreciate her ideas. Many of the chapters in her books were first written for magazines read by the laity and clergy, for radio broadcasts, or for retreats which included people of all walks of life. It was natural that her thoughts be clothed in an easily interpreted idiom. Perhaps one of the basic reasons for her books having such a large sale was due to the clear, easy style of their pages. When her volume *Concerning the Inner Life*



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was reviewed in *The Spectator*, the words of the critic well describe her ability to write:

There may be more learned Christians . . . but there is no one writing in English better qualified to express in everyday life the high and secret conversations that the mind may hold with its Maker. There is something infectious about Miss Underhill's style with its deep-rooted common sense, its virile idiom, and its creaturely appreciation of the beauty of the world. These addresses will bear reading and re-reading, for they are the fruits of a life that is all too rare in this day and age.

Evelyn Underhill wrote much, but her books were never shoddy; nor were they put together in a hurried manner. Many of the chapters of her books, given as lectures several years before publication, show the results of her working them over for lucidity. Her great books, such as *Mysticism* and *Worship*, are carefully documented and contain elaborate bibliographies. Baron von Hügel, however, was intent that she cut down on her productive labors. When in 1924, after she had written fourteen books in fourteen years, he gave her this advice: "Perhaps you have now inherited a little money from your mother so that you can more easily somewhat restrict your literary religious labors. My ideal for you continues, say two-thirds of your output during the average of the last ten years. This, too, would much help towards advance, hidden under apparent retrogression. God bless you: pray for me." However, her output did not let up, even though her later years were disturbed with ill health, especially asthma. We find fourteen more volumes written and edited between 1924 and her death in 1941, exclusive of hundreds of letters of guidance, plus articles for magazines. After her death, four volumes were published: *The Fruits of the Spirit* (1942), *Letters* (edited with an introduction by Charles Williams, 1943), *Light of Christ* (with a Memoir by Lucy Menzies, 1944), and *Collected Papers* (with an Introduction by Lumsden Barkway, Bishop of St. Andrews, 1945).

The following schedule shows the list of her books with a gist of the contents of each volume:

1902—*A Bar-Lamb's Ballad Book*. A rather technical book of legal ballads for those not alert to legal terms, dedicated to one of her cats; a group of humorous, satirical poems related to legal dilemmas. (1)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Publishers referred to by numbers: (1) Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.; (2) Heinemann; (3) Methuen & Co.; (4) J. M. Watkins; (5) J. M. Dent & Sons; E. P. Dutton & Co.; (6) G. Bell & Sons; (7) James Clarke & Co., Ltd.; (8) Longmans, Green & Co.; (9) Nisbet & Co.; (10) Hodder & Stoughton.

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- 1904—*The Grey World*. Her first novel about a slum child, Willie Hopkinson, who dies in a London hospital; who, after an interval in "the grey world" with the dead, is reincarnated on earth in an irreligious suburban environment, to emerge from it step by step on the mystic's journey. (2)
- 1905—*The Miracles of Our Lady St. Mary*. Fairy tales of medieval faith; stories translated from the Latin and old French versions. (2)
- 1907—*The Lost Word*. Her second novel. (2)
- 1909—*The Column of Dust*. A third and last novel. (3)
- 1911—*Path of Eternal Wisdom* (by "John Cordelier"). Her first religious book, an evaluation of "the way of the cross," in which she "attempts to 'make something' of that particular devotion." (4)
- 1911—*Mysticism*. Eleven chapters on a study in the nature and development of man's spiritual consciousness as related to "the mystic facts" and "the mystical way," with an extensive bibliography; now in its twelfth edition. (3)
- 1912—*The Spiral Way* (by "John Cordelier"). Meditations upon the mysteries of the soul's ascent, as based upon fifteen events in the life of Jesus Christ from the Annunciation through the Coronation. (4)
- 1912—*Immanence: A Book of Verses* (3)
- 1913—*The Mystic Way*. A tracing of the meaning of mysticism from Jesus, Paul, and the Johannine view, through the mystic life in the early church, concluding with the witness of the liturgy related to the mystic way. (5)
- 1914—*Practical Mysticism*. Ten chapters with the descriptive subtitle, "A Little Book for Normal People," dealing with mysticism, contemplation, and the meaning of the mystical life. (5)
- 1915—*Ruysbroeck*. A series of studies, written initially for the magazine *The Quest* about Evelyn Underhill's favorite medieval mystic, Jan van Ruysbroeck. (6)
- 1916—*Theophanies*. Her second and last book of verse. (5)
- 1916—Introduction to Wynschenk Dom's *Ruysbroeck*. (5)
- 1919—*Jacopone da Todi*. An appreciation of the brilliant lawyer who became a Franciscan singer about the love of God; perhaps one of the mystics who made a deep impression during the war years on Evelyn Underhill. (5)
- 1920—*The Essentials of Mysticism*. Essays written for magazines during World War I, dealing with mysticism's relation to the

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- Atonement, creative artistry, and the corporate life; and containing chapters on Plotinus, medieval mystics, and modern French mystics. (5)
- 1922—*The Cloud of Unknowing*, edited from British Museum Sources, with an Introduction. (4)
- 1922—*The Life of the Spirit and the Life of To-day*. Upton Lectures given at Manchester College, Oxford, Evelyn Underhill being the first woman invited to give a series of lectures on religion at any Oxford college. (3)
- 1923—*The Scale of Perfection* by Walter Hilton. New edition from manuscript sources with Introduction and Notes. (4)
- 1925—*The Mystics of the Church*. Twelve chapters which trace mysticism from biblical to present times, as related to biographical sketches and ideas of the great mystics; index lists about 150 mystics. (7)
- 1926—*Concerning the Inner Life*. Three chapters which relate the disciplines of prayer to the life of a religious worker. (3)
- 1928—*Man and the Supernatural*. Eight chapters consisting of lectures given at the University of St. Andrews, King's College, London, and at Church Congress of 1926; and articles from *Theology*, *Hibbert Journal*, and the *Guardian*; which show how "religious naturalism still leaves unsatisfied the deepest cravings of the spiritual consciousness." (3)
- 1928—Nicholas of Cusa, *The Vision of God*, with Introduction. (5)
- 1929—*The House of the Soul*. Seven chapters which relate prudence, temperance, fortitude, faith, hope, and love to man's dual nature. (3)
- 1931—Introduction to the English translation of Malaval's *Method of Contemplation*. (5)
- 1932—*The Golden Sequence*. A fourfold study of the spiritual life, dealing with the spirit, the spiritual life, purification, and prayer. (3)
- 1933—*Mixed Pastures*. Twelve essays and addresses given from 1921-33, dealing with social action, the philosophy of contemplation, and personalities of St. Francis of Assisi, Richard the Hermit (Rolle), Walter Hilton, and Baron Friedrich von Hügel. (3)
- 1934—*The School of Charity*. Nine meditations on the principal articles of the Nicene Creed. (8)
- 1936—*Worship*. (Library of Constructive Theology). Fifteen chapters on the nature and principles of worship, ritual and symbol, liturgy and corporate worship, traced from Jewish worship

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- through all the branches of the great Christian churches. (9)
- 1937—*The Spiritual Life*. Four broadcast addresses delivered in the autumn of 1936, "about man's spiritual quest in simple language for everyday practical living." (10)
- 1938—*The Mystery of Sacrifice*. A meditation on the Eucharistic liturgy, following the great outlines of the Eastern and Western liturgies. (8)
- 1939—*Eucharistic Prayers from the Ancient Liturgies*. (8)
- 1940—*Abba*. Meditations based on the Lord's Prayer, dealing with each of the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer. (8)
- 1942—*The Fruits of the Spirit*. Five addresses given at the House of Retreat, Pleshey in 1916, based on Gal. 5: 22, 23. (8)
- 1943—*Letters*, with an Introduction by Charles Williams. From thirty-six persons with whom Evelyn Underhill corresponded, on a variety of subjects (sixty-three are listed in the index); full of wisdom, humor, common sense; containing beauty, breadth, and depth of the Spirit. (8)
- 1944—*Light of Christ*, with a Memoir by Lucy Menzies. Eight talks given at the House of Retreat, Pleshey, in May, 1932, with two chapters given about retreats, and the other six chapters related to the ministries of Christ to everyday living. (8)
- 1945—*Collected Papers*, with an Introduction by Lumsden Barkway, Bishop of St. Andrews. Ten essays and addresses given 1922-37, originally printed as pamphlets and now out of print, except "Life as Prayer." (8)

Books containing materials on the life of Evelyn Underhill:

Cropper, Margaret. *Life of Evelyn Underhill*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958. (Published in England as *Evelyn Underhill*.) 244 pages; and also containing a memoir to Lucy Menzies by Bishop Lumsden Barkway.

Menzies, Lucy (ed.). *Collected Papers of Evelyn Underhill*. New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1946. Contains an Introduction (pp. 7-34) on the life of Evelyn Underhill by Bishop Lumsden Barkway.

Williams, Charles (ed.). *The Letters of Evelyn Underhill*. New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1943. Contains an Introduction (pp. 7-46) on the life of Evelyn Underhill.

*Light of Christ*. New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1944. Contains a Memoir (pp. 9-22) by Lucy Menzies on the life of Evelyn Underhill.

MYSTICISM: the WAY to VITAL RELIGION

*PART ONE*

## WHAT IS MYSTICISM?

Those who are interested in that special attitude towards the universe which is now loosely called "mystical," find themselves beset by a multitude of persons who are constantly asking—some with real fervour, some with curiosity, and some with disdain—"What is mysticism?" When referred to the writings of the mystics themselves, and to other works in which this question appears to be answered, these people reply that such books are wholly incomprehensible to them.

On the other hand, the genuine inquirer will find before long a number of self-appointed apostles who are eager to answer his question in many strange and inconsistent ways, calculated to increase rather than resolve the obscurity of his mind. He will learn that mysticism is a philosophy, an illusion, a kind of religion, a disease; that it means having visions, performing conjuring tricks, leading an idle, dreamy, and selfish life, neglecting one's business, wallowing in vague spiritual emotions, and being "in tune with the infinite." He will discover that it emancipates him from all dogmas—sometimes from all morality—and at the same time that it is very superstitious. One expert tells him that it is simply "Catholic piety," another that Walt Whitman was a typical mystic; a third assures him that all mysticism comes from the East, and supports his statement by an appeal to the mango trick. At the end of a prolonged course of lectures, sermons, tea parties, and talks with earnest persons, the inquirer is still heard saying—too often in tones of exasperation—"What is mysticism?" . . .

Here is the definition:—

*Mysticism is the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment.*

It is not expected that the inquirer will find great comfort in this sentence when first it meets his eye. The ultimate question, "What is Reality?"—a question, perhaps, which never occurred to him before—is already forming in his mind; and he knows that it will cause him infinite distress. Only a mystic can answer it: and he, in terms which other mystics alone will understand. Therefore, for the time being, the practical man may put it on one side. All that he is asked

to consider now is this: that the word "union" represents not so much a rare and unimaginable operation, as something which he is doing, in a vague, imperfect fashion, at every moment of his conscious life; and doing with intensity and thoroughness in all the more valid moments of that life. We know a thing only by uniting with it; by assimilating it; by an interpenetration of it and ourselves. It gives itself to us, just in so far as we give ourselves to it; and it is because our outflow towards things is usually so perfunctory and so languid, that our comprehension of things is so perfunctory and languid too. The great Sufi who said that "Pilgrimage to the place of the wise, is to escape the flame of separation" spoke the literal truth. Wisdom is the fruit of communion; ignorance the inevitable portion of those who "keep themselves to themselves," and stand apart, judging, analysing the things which they have never truly known.

Because he has surrendered himself to it, "united" with it, the patriot knows his country, the artist knows the subject of his art, the lover his beloved, the saint his God, in a manner which is inconceivable as well as unattainable by the looker-on. Real knowledge, since it always implies an intuitive sympathy more or less intense, is far more accurately suggested by the symbols of touch and taste than by those of hearing and sight. True analytic thought follows swiftly upon the contact, the apprehension, the union: and we, in our muddle-headed way, have persuaded ourselves that this is the essential part of knowledge—that it is, in fact, more important to cook the hare than to catch it. But when we get rid of this illusion and go back to the more primitive activities through which our mental kitchen gets its supplies, we see that the distinction between mystic and non-mystic is not merely that between the rationalist and the dreamer, between intellect and intuition. The question which divides them is really this: What, out of the mass of material offered to it, shall consciousness seize upon—with what aspects of the universe shall it "unite"? . . .

Because mystery is horrible to us, we have agreed for the most part to live in a world of labels; to make of them the current coin of experience, and ignore their merely symbolic character, the infinite gradation of values which they misrepresent. We simply do not attempt to unite with Reality. But now and then that symbolic character is suddenly brought home to us. Some great emotion, some devastating visitation of beauty, love, or pain, lifts us to another level of consciousness; and we are aware for a moment of the difference between the neat collection of discrete objects and experiences which

we call the world, and the height, the depth, the breadth of that living, growing, changing Fact, of which thought, life, and energy are parts, and in which we "live and move and have our being." Then we realise that our whole life is enmeshed in great and living forces; terrible because unknown. Even the power which lurks in every coal-scuttle, shines in the electric lamp, pants in the motor-omnibus, declares itself in the ineffable wonders of reproduction and growth, is supersensual. We do but perceive its results. The more sacred plane of life and energy which seems to be manifested in the forces we call "spiritual" and "emotional"—in love, anguish, ecstasy, adoration—is hidden from us too. Symptoms, appearances, are all that our intellects can discern: sudden irresistible inroads from it, all that our hearts can apprehend. The material for an intenser life, a wider, sharper consciousness, a more profound understanding of our own existence, lies at our gates. But we are separated from it, we cannot assimilate it; except in abnormal moments, we hardly know that it is there.

We now begin to attach at least a fragmentary meaning to the statement that "mysticism is the art of union with Reality." We see that the claim of such a poet as Whitman to be a mystic lies in the fact that he has achieved a passionate communion with deeper levels of life than those with which we usually deal—has thrust past the current notion to the Fact: that the claim of such a saint as Teresa is bound up with her declaration that she had achieved union with the Divine Essence itself. The visionary is a mystic when his vision mediates to him an actuality beyond the reach of the senses. The philosopher is a mystic when he passes beyond thought to the pure apprehension of truth. The active man is a mystic when he knows his actions to be a part of a greater activity. Blake, Plotinus, Joan of Arc, and John of the Cross—there is a link which binds all these together: but if he is to make use of it, the inquirer must find that link for himself. All four exhibit different forms of the working of the contemplative consciousness; a faculty which is proper to all men, though few take the trouble to develop it. Their attention to life has changed its character, sharpened its focus; and as a result they see, some a wider landscape, some a more brilliant, more significant, more detailed world than that which is apparent to the less educated, less observant vision of common sense. . . .

Therefore it is to a practical mysticism that the practical man is here invited: to a training of his latent faculties, a bracing and brightening of his languid consciousness, an emancipation from the



fetters of appearance, a turning of his attention to new levels of the world. Thus he may become aware of the universe which the spiritual artist is always trying to disclose to the race. This amount of mystical perception—this “ordinary contemplation,” as the specialists call it—is possible to all men: without it, they are not wholly conscious, nor wholly alive. It is a natural human activity, no more involving the great powers and sublime experiences of the mystical saints and philosophers than the ordinary enjoyment of music involves the special creative powers of the great musician.

As the beautiful does not exist for the artist and poet alone—though these can find in it more poignant depths of meaning than other men—so the world of Reality exists for all; and all may participate in it, unite with it, according to their measure and to the strength and purity of their desire.

—*Practical Mysticism*, 1-12

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MYSTICISM

### (1) *Mysticism is practical, not theoretical*

This statement, taken alone, is not, of course, enough to identify mysticism; since it is equally true of magic, which also proposes to itself something to be done rather than something to be believed. It at once comes into collision, however, with the opinions of those who believe mysticism to be “the reaction of the born Platonist upon religion.”

The difference between such devout philosophers and the true mystic, is the difference which George Tyrrell held to distinguish revelation from theology. Mysticism, like revelation, is final and personal. It is not merely a beautiful and suggestive diagram but experience in its most intense form. That experience, in the words of Plotinus, is the soul’s solitary adventure: “the flight of the Alone to the Alone.” It provides the material, the substance, upon which mystical philosophy cogitates; as theologians cogitate upon the revelation which forms the basis of faith. Hence those whom we are to accept as mystics must have received, and acted upon, intuitions of a Truth which is for them absolute. . . .

Over and over again the great mystics tell us, not how they speculated, but how they acted. To them, the transition from the life of

sense to the life of spirit is a formidable undertaking, which demands effort and constancy. The paradoxical "quiet" of the contemplative is but the outward stillness essential to inward work. . . .

(2) *Mysticism is an entirely Spiritual Activity*

This rule provides us with a further limitation, which of course excludes all the practisers of magic and of magical religion: even in their most exalted and least materialistic forms. As we shall see when we come to consider these persons, their object—not necessarily an illegitimate one—is to improve and elucidate the visible by help of the invisible: to use the supernormal powers of the self for the increase of power, virtue, happiness or knowledge. The mystic never turns back on himself in this way, or tries to combine the advantages of two worlds. At the term of his development he knows God by communion, and this direct intuition of the Absolute kills all lesser cravings. He possesses God, and needs nothing more. Though he will spend himself unceasingly for other men, become "an agent of the Eternal Goodness," he is destitute of supersensual ambitions and craves no occult knowledge or power. Having his eyes set on eternity, his consciousness steeped in it, he can well afford to tolerate the entanglements of time. . . .

(3) *The business and method of Mysticism is Love.*

Here is one of the distinctive notes of true mysticism. . . . It is the eager, outgoing activity whose driving power is generous love, not the absorbent, indrawing activity which strives only for new knowledge, that is fruitful in the spiritual as well as in the physical world.

Having said this, however, we must add—as we did when speaking of the "heart"—that the word Love as applied to the mystics is to be understood in its deepest, fullest sense; as the ultimate expression of the self's most vital tendencies, not as the superficial affection or emotion often dignified by this name. Mystic Love is a total dedication of the will; the deep-seated desire and tendency of the soul towards its Source. It is a condition of humble access, a life-movement of the self: more direct in its methods, more valid in its results—even in the hands of the least lettered of its adepts—than the most piercing intellectual vision of the greatest philosophic mind. . . .

Love to the mystic, then, is (a) the active, connative, expression of his will and desire for the Absolute; (b) his innate tendency to that Absolute, his spiritual weight. He is only thoroughly natural, thoroughly alive, when he is obeying its voice. For him it is the source of joy, the secret of the universe, the vivifying principle of things. . . .

(4) *Mysticism entails a definite Psychological Experience.*

That is to say, it shows itself not merely as an attitude of mind and heart, but as a form of organic life. It is not only a theory of the intellect or a hunger, however passionate, of the heart. It involves the organizing of the whole self, conscious and unconscious, under the spur of such a hunger: a remaking of the whole character on high levels in the interests of the transcendental life. The mystics are emphatic in their statement that spiritual desires are useless unless they initiate this costly movement of the whole self towards the Real. . . .

(5) As a corollary to these four rules, it is perhaps well to reiterate the statement already made, that *True Mysticism is never self-seeking*. It is not, as many think, the pursuit of supernatural joys; the satisfaction of a high ambition. The mystic does not enter on his quest because he desires the happiness of the Beatific Vision, the ecstasy of union with the Absolute, or any other personal reward. That noblest of all passions, the passion for perfection for Love's sake, far outweighs the desire for transcendental satisfaction. "O Love," said St. Catherine of Genoa, "I do not wish to follow thee for sake of these delights, but solely from the motive of true love." Those who do otherwise are only, in the plain words of St. John of the Cross, "spiritual gluttons": or, in the milder metaphor here adopted, magicians of the more high-minded sort. The true mystic claims no promises and makes no demands. He goes because he must, as Galahad went towards the Grail: knowing that for those who can live it, this alone is life. He never rests in that search for God which he holds to be the fulfilment of his highest duty; yet he seeks without any certainty of success. . . .

Like his type, the "devout lover" of romance, then, the mystic serves without hope of reward. By one of the many paradoxes of the spiritual life, he obtains satisfaction because he does not seek it; completes his personality because he gives it up. . . .

To sum up. Mysticism is seen to be a highly specialized form of that search for reality, for heightened and completed life, which we have found to be a constant characteristic of human consciousness. It is largely prosecuted by that "spiritual spark," that transcendental faculty which, though the life of our life, remains below the threshold in ordinary men. Emerging from its hiddenness in the mystic, it gradually becomes the dominant factor in his life; subduing to its service, and enhancing by its saving contact with reality, those vital powers of love and will which we attribute to the heart, rather than those of mere reason and perception, which we attribute to the head. Under the

spur of this love and will, the whole personality rises in the acts of contemplation and ecstasy to a level of consciousness at which it becomes aware of a new field of perception. By this awareness, by this "loving sight," it is stimulated to a new life in accordance with the Reality which it has beheld. So strange and exalted is this life, that it never fails to provoke either the anger or the admiration of other men.

—*Mysticism*, 82-94

## THE MYSTICAL LIFE

And here the practical man . . . asks once more, with a certain explosive violence, his dear old question, "What is the *use* of all this?"

"You have introduced me," he says further, "to some curious states of consciousness, interesting enough in their way; and to a lot of peculiar emotion, many of which are no doubt most valuable to poets and so on. But it is all so remote from daily life. How is it going to fit in with ordinary existence? How, above all, is it all going to help *me*?"

Well, put upon its lowest plane, this new way of attending to life—this deepening and widening of outlook—may at least be as helpful to you as many things to which you have unhesitatingly consecrated much time and diligence in the past: your long journeys to new countries, for instance, or long hours spent in acquiring new "facts," relabelling old experiences, gaining skill in new arts and games. These, it is true, were quite worth the effort expended on them: for they gave you, in exchange for your labour and attention, a fresh view of certain fragmentary things, a new point of contact with the rich world of possibilities, a tiny enlargement of your universe in one direction or another. Your love and patient study of nature, art, science, politics, business—even of sport—repaid you thus. But I have offered you, in exchange for a meek and industrious attention to another aspect of the world, hitherto somewhat neglected by you, an enlargement which shall include and transcend all these; and be conditioned only by the perfection of your generosity, courage, and surrender.

Nor are you to suppose that this enlargement will be limited to certain new spiritual perceptions, which the art of contemplation has

made possible for you: that it will merely draw the curtain from a window out of which you have never looked. This new wide world is not to be for you something seen, but something lived in: and you—since man is a creature of responses—will insensibly change under its influence, growing up into a more perfect conformity with it. Living in this atmosphere of Reality, you will, in fact, yourself become more real. . . .

You are still, it is true, living the ordinary life of the body. You are immersed in the stream of duration; a part of the human, the social, the national group. The emotions, instincts, needs, of that group affect you. Your changing scrap of vitality contributes to its corporate life; and contributes the more effectively since a new, intuitive sympathy has now made its interests your own. Because of that corporate life, transfusing you, giving to you and taking from you—conditioning you as it does in countless oblique and unapparent ways—you are still compelled to react to many suggestions which you are no longer able to respect: controlled, to the last moment of your bodily existence and perhaps afterwards, by habit, custom, the good old average way of misunderstanding the world. To this extent, the crowd-spirit has you in its grasp.

Yet in spite of all this, you are now released from that crowd's tyrannically overwhelming consciousness as you never were before. You feel yourself now a separate vivid entity, a real, whole man: dependent on the Whole, and gladly so dependent, yet within that whole a free self-governing thing. Perhaps you always fancied that your will was free—that you were actually, as you sometimes said, the "captain of your soul." If so, this was merely one amongst the many illusions which supported your old, enslaved career. As a matter of fact, you were driven along a road, unaware of anything that lay beyond the hedges, pressed on every side by other members of the flock; getting perhaps a certain satisfaction out of the deep warm stir of the collective life, but ignorant of your destination, and with your personal initiative limited to the snatching of grass as you went along, the pushing of your way to the softer side of the track. These operations made up together that which you called Success. But now, because you have achieved a certain power of gathering yourself together, perceiving yourself as a person, a spirit, and observing your relation with these other individual lives—because too, hearing now and again the mysterious piping of the Shepherd, you realise your own perpetual forward movement and that of the flock, in its relation to that living guide—you have a far deeper,

truer knowledge than ever before both of the general and the individual existence; and so are able to handle life with a surer hand. . . . Your journey ceases to be an automatic progress, and takes on some of the characters of a free act: for "things" are now under you, you are no longer under them.

You will hardly deny that this is a practical gain: that this widening and deepening of the range over which your powers of perception work makes you more of a man than you were before, and thus adds to rather than subtracts from your total practical efficiency. It is indeed only when he reaches these levels, and feels within himself this creative freedom—this full actualisation of himself—on the one hand: on the other hand the sense of a world-order, a love and energy on which he depends and with whose interests he is now at one, that man becomes fully human, capable of living the real life of Eternity in the midst of the world of time.

And what, when you have come to it, do you suppose to be your own function in this vast twofold scheme? Is it for nothing, do you think, that you are thus a meeting-place of two orders? Surely it is your business, so far as you may, to express in action something of the real character of that universe within which you now know yourself to live? Artists, aware of a more vivid and more beautiful world than other men, are always driven by their love and enthusiasm to try and express, bring into direct manifestation, those deeper significances of form, sound, rhythm, which they have been able to apprehend: and, doing this, they taste deeper and deeper truths, make ever closer unions with the Real. For them, the duty of creation is tightly bound up with the gift of love. . . .

It is in action, then, that these find their truest and safest point of insertion into the living, active world of Reality: in sharing and furthering its work of manifestation they know its secrets best. For them contemplation and action are not opposites, but two interdependent forms of a life that is *one*—a life that rushes out to a passionate communion with the true and beautiful, only that it may draw from this direct experience of Reality a new intensity wherewith to handle the world of things; and remake it, or at least some little bit of it, "nearer to the heart's desire."

Again, the great mystics tell us that the "vision of God in His own light"—the direct contact of the soul's substance with the Absolute—to which awful experience you drew as near as the quality of your spirit would permit in the third degree of contemplation, is the prelude, not to a further revelation of the eternal order given to you,

but to an utter change, a vivid life springing up within you, which they sometimes call the "transforming union" or the "birth of the Son in the soul." By this they mean that the spark of spiritual stuff, that high special power or character of human nature, by which you first desire, then tended to, then achieved contact with Reality, is as it were fertilized by this profound communion with its origin; becomes strong and vigorous, invades and transmutes the whole personality, and makes of it, not a "dreamy mystic" but an active and impassioned servant of the Eternal Wisdom.

So that when these full-grown, fully vital mystics try to tell us about the life they have achieved, it is always an intensely active life that they describe. They say, not that they "dwell in restful fruition," though the deep and joyous knowledge of this, perhaps too the perpetual longing for an utter self-loss in it, is always possessed by them—but that they "go up *and down* the ladder of contemplation." They stretch up towards the Point, the unique Reality to which all the intricate and many-coloured lines of life flow, and in which they are merged; and rush out towards those various lives in a passion of active love and service. . . .

To "bring Eternity into Time," the "invisible into concrete expression"; to "be to the Eternal Goodness what his own hand is to a man"—these are the plainly expressed desires of all the great mystics. One and all, they demand earnest and deliberate action, the insertion of the purified and ardent will into the world of things. The mystics are artists; and the stuff in which they work is most often human life. They want to heal the disharmony between the actual and the real: and since, in the white-hot radiance of that faith, hope and charity which burns in them, they discern such a reconciliation to be possible, they are able to work for it with a singleness of purpose and an invincible optimism denied to other men. This was the instinct which drove St. Francis of Assisi to the practical experience of that poverty which he recognised as the highest wisdom; St. Catherine of Siena from contemplation to politics; Joan of Arc to the salvation of France; St. Teresa to the formation of an ideal religious family; Fox to the proclaiming of a world-religion in which all men should be guided by the Inner Light; Florence Nightingale to battle with officials, vermin, dirt and disease in the soldiers' hospitals; Octavia Hill to make in London slums something a little nearer "the shadows of the angels' houses" than that which the practical landlord usually provides. . . .

So, what is being offered to you is not merely a choice amongst new states of consciousness, new emotional experiences—though these

are indeed involved in it—but, above all else, a larger and intenser life, a career, a total consecration to the interests of the Real. This life shall not be abstract and dreamy, made up, as some imagine, of negations. It shall be violently practical and affirmative; giving scope for a limitless activity of will, heart, and mind working within the rhythms of the Divine Idea. It shall cost much, making perpetual demands on your loyalty, trust, and self-sacrifice: proving now the need and the worth of that training in renunciation which was forced on you at the beginning of your interior life. It shall be both deep and wide, embracing in its span all those aspects of Reality which the gradual extension of your contemplative powers has disclosed to you: making “the inner and outer worlds to be indivisibly One.” And because the emphasis is now for ever shifted from the accidents to the substance of life, it will matter where and how this career is actualised—whether in convent or factory, study or battlefield, multitude or solitude, sickness or strength. These fluctuations of circumstance will no longer dominate you; since “it is Love that payeth for all.”

—*Practical Mysticism*, 148-67

## PREPARATION OF A MYSTIC

The education of the mystical sense begins in self-simplification. The feeling, willing, seeing self is to move from the various and the analytic to the simple and the synthetic: a sentence which may cause hard breathing and mopping of the brows on the part of the practical man. Yet it is to you, practical man, reading these pages as you rush through the tube to the practical work of rearranging unimportant fragments of your universe, that this message so needed by your time—or rather, by your want of time—is addressed. To you, unconscious analyst, so busy reading the advertisements upon the carriage wall, that you hardly observe the stages of your unceasing flight: so anxiously acquisitive of the crumbs that you never lift your eyes to the loaf. The essence of mystical contemplation is summed in these two experiences—union with the flux of life, and union with the Whole in which all lesser realities are resumed—and these experiences are well within your reach. Though it is likely that the accusation will annoy you, you are already in fact a potential contemplative:



for this act, as St. Thomas Aquinas taught, is proper to all men—is, indeed, the characteristic human activity.

More, it is probable that you are, or have been, an actual contemplative too. Has it never happened to you to lose yourself for a moment in a swift and satisfying experience for which you found no name? When the world took on a strangeness, and you rushed out to meet it, in a mood at once exultant and ashamed? Was there not an instant when you took the lady who now orders your dinner into your arms, and she suddenly interpreted to you the whole of the universe? a universe so great, charged with so terrible an intensity, that you have hardly dared to think of it since. Do you remember that horrid moment at the concert, when you became wholly unaware of your comfortable seven-and-sixpenny seat? Those were onsets of involuntary contemplation; sudden partings of the conceptual veil. Dare you call them the least significant moments of your life? Did you not then, like the African saint, "thrill with love and dread," though you were not provided with a label for that which you adored?

It will not help you to speak of these experiences as "mere emotion." Mere emotion then inducted you into a world which you recognised as more valid—in the highest sense, more rational—than that in which you usually dwell: a world which had a wholeness, a meaning, which exceeded the sum of its parts. Mere emotion then brought you to your knees, made you at once proud and humble, showed you your place. It simplified and unified existence: it stripped off the little accidents and ornaments which perpetually deflect our vagrant attention, and gathered up the whole being of you into one state, which felt and knew a Reality that your intelligence could not comprehend. Such an emotion is the driving power of spirit, an august and ultimate thing: and this your innermost inhabitant felt it to be, whilst your eyes were open to the light.

Now that simplifying act, which is the preliminary of all mystical experience, that gathering of the scattered bits of personality into the one which is really you—into the "unity of your spirit," as the mystics say—the great forces of love, beauty, wonder, grief, may do for you now and again. These lift you perforce from the consideration of the details to the contemplation of the All: turn you from the tidy world of image to the ineffable world of fact. But they are fleeting and ungovernable experiences, descending with dreadful violence on the soul. Are you willing that your participation in Reality shall depend wholly on these incalculable visitations: on the sudden wind and rain that wash your windows, and let in the vision of the landscape

at your gates? You can, if you like, keep those windows clear. You can, if you choose to turn your attention that way, learn to look out of them. These are the two great phases in the education of every contemplative: and they are called in the language of the mystics the purification of the senses and the purification of the will. . . .

What is it that smears the windows of the senses? Thought, convention, self-interest. We throw a mist of thought between ourselves and the external world: and through this we discern, as in a glass darkly, that which we have arranged to see. We see it in the way in which our neighbours see it; sometimes through a pink veil, sometimes through a grey. Religion, indigestion, priggishness, or discontent may drape the panes. The prismatic colours of a fashionable school of art may stain them. . . . To "purify" the senses is to release them, so far as human beings may, from the tyranny of egocentric judgments; to make of them the organs of direct perception. This means that we must crush our deep-seated passion for classification and correspondences; ignore the instinctive, selfish question, "What does it mean to *me*?"; learn to dip ourselves in the universe at our gates, and know it, not from without by comprehension, but from within by self-mergence. . . .

So then, man, in the person of his greatest and most living representatives, feels himself to have implicit correspondences with three levels of existence; which we may call the Natural, the Spiritual, and the Divine. The road on which he is to travel therefore, the mystical education which he is to undertake, shall successively unite him with these three worlds; stretching his consciousness to the point at which he finds them first as three, and at last as One. Under normal circumstances even the first of them, the natural world of Becoming, is only present to him—unless he be an artist—in a vague and fragmentary way. He is, of course, aware of the temporal order, a ceaseless change and movement, birth, growth, and death, of which he is a part. But the rapture and splendour of that everlasting flux which India calls the Sport of God hardly reaches his understanding; he is too busy with his own little movements to feel the full current of the stream. . . .

We begin, therefore, to see that the task of union with Reality will involve certain stages of preparation as well as stages of attainment; and these stages of preparation—for some disinterested souls easy and rapid, for others long and full of pain—may be grouped under two heads. First, the disciplining and simplifying of the attention, which is the essence of Recollection. Next, the disciplining and simplifying

of the affections and will, the orientation of the heart; which is sometimes called by the formidable name of Purgation. So the practical mysticism of the plain man will best be grasped by him as a fivefold scheme of training and growth: in which the first two stages prepare the self for union with Reality, and the last three unite it successively with the World of Becoming, the World of Being, and finally with that Ultimate Fact which the philosopher calls the Absolute and the religious mystic calls God.

—*Practical Mysticism*, 29-45

## MYSTICAL ABSORPTION OF THE SAINT

March 1, 1933

So far as I can see, the sense of "absorption" with nature and with other beings is far more characteristic of the nature-mystics and the pantheists than of the real Christian mystics. The deep love and sympathy with mankind, and often with all life, which one finds in them seems to be the direct result of their sense of union with the Divine Charity. They aim at that first, and thence flow out, as Ruysbroeck said, in a "wide-spreading love to all in common." The saints whom I have known in the flesh have often been quite unable to keep anything for themselves, and have agonized deeply for the world's suffering; but I don't think they felt any mystical absorption in life in general. They just loved all things with God's love. That is why I always feel that the best way to teach the Second Commandment is to concentrate on the First!

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 209

## FUNDAMENTALS OF RELIGION

Human religion begins with the spectacle—so startling, if we could but view it with detachment—of a self-conscious spirit emerging, he knows not how or why, from the flux of physical life; contemplating that flux and finding himself unable to be satisfied with it; and thus realizing his implicit relationship with, and need of, something other

than the apparent physical world. It shows us this peculiar creature parting company with his animal relations, and beginning a blundering search for the hiding place of that haunting Presence which seems to speak to him from the burning bush. Thus, after many bad guesses, by dint of trial and error, we see man achieving the Idea of God.

It is clear that from the moment in which man thus reaches—in however vague and crude a way—the Idea of God, he ceases to live in and respond to a merely physical world. Perfect adaptation to that world is no longer his standard. His implicit relationship with something other than the physical becomes more or less explicit; a genuine correspondence begins to be established between this living and unstable creature, and a stable Reality beyond the reach of sense. The history of religion first appears to us as the history of this special human craving to discover the relation in which we stand to the eternal reality of the universe; this embryonic instinct for the transcendent. It begins with the vague sense of unexplained powers conditioning us. It leads up to the acknowledgement of affinity and dependence contained in the great saying of St. Augustine, "God is the only reality; and we are only real in so far as we are in His order and He in us"—a marvellous thought, surely, for the little human creature to achieve.

We may put all this in a more controversial way, and in language which many people will resist, by saying that human religion marks the point of contact between natural and supernatural orders; and that it is on the fringe-region between those orders, that the spiritual consciousness of man flickers to and fro. The word "supernatural" is now out of fashion, having been cheapened by careless use; and modern thought is hostile to the dualism that it suggests. But those who dislike this antithesis of nature and supernature must still concede that in all its permutations, growth, rising, and falling, even in its worst corruptions and extravagances, religion does maintain one fundamental character: that of witnessing to a living and abiding Reality which is distinct from and beyond the world. It cannot be set aside as one of the devices by which the abstraction called Nature bribes or frightens man into becoming his natural best: for it often enters into sharpest conflict with that natural best. Nor can it be explained as a consoling fantasy; for its ultimate demands are the hardest that humanity has to meet.

Once he is religiously awakened, we always find that man becomes strangely and dimly aware that a demand is made on him and a gift is offered to him, which cannot be expressed in natural terms and

aware too of his own status, as a creature who is somehow capable of relations with a more than natural world. This is what religion says, and says all the time. We may think that it is struggling to state a supernal truth, or that it is perpetuating a lie born of the nightmares of primitive man. But if a lie, then we are left without any theory able to account for all that is involved in the mere existence of human spirituality—its heroism, devotedness and transfiguring power, its persistent and difficult orientation to an other-worldly end—though it is easy enough to explain or discredit its lower manifestations, if these are taken alone. Indeed, even the naturalistic critics who do thus discredit it are driven in the end to adopt the standards of value of that very conception of life which their theories reject: for all morality worthy of the name has arisen under the influence of religious imperatives. . . .

What then do these facts, which we cannot ignore if we want to look squarely at human experience, imply for us? What is their bearing on our conception of Reality, of life, and of ourselves—those three mysteries which we cannot solve and cannot escape? Here is the human soul, constantly asking of the other Reality over against us the eternal question which was formulated by St. Francis: "What art Thou? and what am I?" And there are the innumerable religions and philosophies of the world, propounding their answers. . . .

Neither those who ask, nor those who provide answers for these fundamental questions, seem fully to have realized the strangeness of the fact that the questions are asked again and again. But could the human race and human history be seen from outside by an intelligent personality which had never heard of the religious sense—an observer possessing both width and depth of vision, and so able to see the whole human world intensively and yet relatively, as one might see a tiny ant-heap in the solemn cosmic forest—surely it is the oddness and "unnaturalness" of our spiritual longings and experiments which would strike him first? For here we have a small ephemeral animal; one amongst the many various creatures evolved upon, and anchored to, one of the smaller fragments in an uncounted stellar universe. And this fragile, ever-changing little creature, whose birth and death conform so perfectly to the rest of the physical routine, and whose visible existence is unlikely to outlast seventy or eighty journeys round the sun, is yet possessed of an innate sense of the Unchanging. His limited faculties seem to have been wholly developed in response to the threats and invitations of the ever-changing physical world, and trained to assist him to live and breed in it; yet he

refuses to be satisfied by those given aspects of reality which are so plainly present to his senses and are all those senses know. Alone among the jostling crowd of related organisms which surround him, feed him, threaten him and fear him, he is found again and again rejecting the obvious and inescapable landscape to which he is adapted, and seeking persistently for something unseen.

Our detached observer would therefore perceive an animal possessing a mental machine which has been developed through correspondence with a sensual world, and is indeed only truly adequate to its data and requirements. Yet he would see this machine deliberately turned by its controlling entity away from and beyond that sensual world to which it is fitted, and set tentatively and rather clumsily to seek for contact with another order of reality: and this for no utilitarian purpose, but in obedience to a craving which it could not understand. He would see man, at various stages of his racial childhood and adolescence, choosing out of his environment some power or object as yet inexplicable to him, on which to fasten his creaturely sense of dependence and impulse of adoration. A mountain, a river, a stream, thunder and lightning, sun, moon, or fire; the mysterious power that gives fertility, brings pestilence, presides over birth and death—anything standing over against the mind, as an ensign and reminder of that Reality which is always felt but never understood. And as mind, becoming more clearly conscious, achieved a more and more perfect control of its animal home; so the symbols and acts through which it apprehended the Infinite would be seen to expand in majesty and meaning. He would also see that no other member of the animal creation looked out upon the natural scene with this sense of incompleteness, or showed any signs of discovering within and beyond it the demand and attraction of another level of life. . . .

Perhaps our observing mind would presently perceive that something more was involved in the phenomena on which he looked than a strange craving, more or less acutely realized, and a more or less complete satisfaction of it. He might see that the up-stretching of these little animals to Something Other did not originate within their dim and half-real lives, and could not properly be described in terms of development from within. On the contrary, it was always called forth, occasioned and met by an inpouring from beyond the apparent theatre of their life; and was indeed a response to, rather than a seeking of, an Absolute Reality which already transfused and sustained them. And further, he would see that this correspondence of the childish human spirit with its true and living *Patria* was not sterile. It started and

maintained a veritable growth and transformation. There was, on the part of some of those fugitive creatures in whom the supernatural sense developed, a gradual yet actual absorption and bodying forth of that Infinite Reality, which yet so immeasurably transcended the vague and limited minds of men.

He would see, in fact, the production of sanctity. Thus, by sharing both the limitations and the privileges of the created, he would learn the three primary truths which seem to govern man's dim or vivid experience of the Infinite: God's initial movement and invitation, man's return movement to God, and sanctity, God-likeness, as the possible term of his spiritual growth. He would feel the ever present activity of an unchanging Life beyond yet within life, recognized in and through the various hints and incarnations of the temporal order; and would see the seeking spirits of men to be themselves bathed and upheld all the time in and by that very Ocean of Spirit for which they seek and crave.

—*Man and the Supernatural*, 1-17

## THE SUPERNATURAL AND THE NATURAL

Let us now go back to the diagram of the universe. . . . A doctrine of the indwelling of this visible world by an invisible, yet truly existent, world of spirit; which, while infinitely transcending, yet everywhere supports and permeates the natural scene. Even to say this, is to blur the true issue by resort to the deceptive spatial language which colours and controls our thoughts, and translate the dynamic and spiritual into static and intellectual terms.

The first demand we must make of such a diagram is, that it shall at least safeguard, though it can never represent, all the best that man has learned to apprehend of the distinct and rich reality of God. This, I think, will be found to mean that it cannot be the diagram of the philosophic monist. For that which above all a genuine theism requires of our human ways of thinking, is the acknowledgment of two sorts of stages of reality, which can never be washed down into one: of a twofoldness that goes right through man's experience, and cannot without impoverishment be resolved. We may call these two sorts of reality, this twofoldness, by various names—Supernature and Nature, Eternity and Time, God and the World, Infinite and Finite,



Creator and Creature. These terms do but emphasize one or another aspect of a total fact too great for us to grasp, without infringing the central truth of its mysterious duality: for "God," as Plotinus says, "never was the All. That would make Him dependent on His universe."

Certainly we may, and indeed must, hold that there is intimate contact between these pairs of opposites. Spiritual reality is not, and never can be, cut off from the world of sense: were it so, we could never have guessed its existence. There is at every point and on every level a penetration of God of His world; a truth which underlies the Christian doctrines of the Holy Spirit and the sacraments. "What place is there within me, whither my God cannot come?" says St. Augustine: "I should not exist, were Thou not already within me." . . .

Man has always dimly felt this doubleness in his experience; but has not always rightly defined its character, and put the cleavage where it really comes. He has insisted at one time or other on the distinctness and opposition between matter and spirit, between good and evil, between appearance and "reality." But physical science is bringing the first pair of supposed opposites into ever closer harmony; whilst the second pair, though based on a true and terrible distinction, is blurred by our unstable and childly self-interested views as to that which is evil and that which is good. . . .

Such a modified dualism as this seems then essential to us, if man's most living apprehensions of Reality are to be given intelligible form. It is true that we are not compelled to regard this duality of Nature and Supernature as ultimate: but this is of slight importance, since ultimates are beyond our grasp. At this point it is perhaps enough if we say that we are obliged to divide our apprehensions, in order the better to apprehend them. We need a philosophic scheme which marks the absolute distinctness in kind between the richly personal yet spaceless Reality of God—and, depending on this, the derived reality of the God-possessed—and all that is not God or thus God-possessed: between Supernatural and Natural worlds. All religion, in its beauty and its queerness, its noble self-oblation and perverse fanaticism, arises out of this one fact; that man really is a creature of the borderland, who without ever abandoning his utterly creaturely character, is yet inherently capable of living in both these worlds—one by "nature," the other by "adoption," as the theologians say. . . .

The mystics at any rate . . . insist on the fundamental and experienced distinction—though not the separation—between God and His world, between Spirit even at its homeliest and Nature even at its best. In so doing they appear to offer a valuable corrective to three



aberrations which constantly appear in the history of religious thought, and are specially prominent at the present time. These are the tendencies, first, to demand from our religious constructions an excess of this-world utility; next, to ask of them an excess of simplicity; and finally, to concentrate on the element of succession and change, to the exclusion of the element of permanence.

(1) First, as to the utilitarian tendency in current philosophies of religion; the rejection of other-worldliness, the contempt for all that is implied in asceticism, the subordination of faith to works, the immense attention paid to man and very trifling attention paid to God, the anxious determination that both world and individual shall get something out of religion. This progressive anthropocentricism is manifested in the almost exclusive emphasis now placed by many teachers on what is called "social Christianity"—really altruism with a little evangelical varnish—and in the ever-increasing willingness to adopt pragmatic standards in matter of doctrine, and to reduce devotional practice to a branch of applied psychology. It can only end by taking the very heart out of religion rightly understood, and thus destroying the source of its own energies. . . .

(2) We are brought thus to the second point on which the findings of spiritual genius oppose prevalent tendencies in religious philosophy; that is, their firm refusal to simplify over-much their conception of God. Influenced no doubt by the successes of physical science, many thinkers now take for granted that the more spiritual facts and experiences we can assume under one so-called law, the nearer we are getting to truth: whereas the only thing to which we are actually getting nearer is philosophic tidiness—a bad trap for seekers after reality. We have no real reason, other than a scientific arrogance which has its absurd aspect, for supposing that such arbitrary simplifications are in accordance with the mind of God. . . .

(3) That pious naturalism seems at present to tend to such an exclusive discovery of God in Nature, such an exaggerated emphasis on process, succession, and emergence, as shall, in effect, equate the life-force with the Spirit of God; and represent the spiritual life of man as simply a natural development from within the world—the crown of creative evolution. Our generation, intoxicated by theories of evolution and development borrowed—and very often bowdlerized—from natural science, seems to have gone headlong for that which a deeper philosophy, enriched by the experiences of the saints, recognized long ago as only one of the two movements of Reality. It has developed a superstitious *cultus* of continuity; which, it is felt, must somehow be

made to stretch without a break all the way from the amoeba to the Absolute. . . . In its extreme form it is indistinguishable from pantheism—e.g. as when a philosophic essayist was lately betrayed by the attractions of Neo-Hegelianism into defining God as “a self-imparting life striving upwards to full expression in the development of human consciousness,” and the philosophic goal as “the apprehension of Reality as a comprehensive unity, expressing itself in a universe that comes to consciousness in man.”

Such an assumption as this—that Infinite Holiness is finding its fullest expression in the mental development of our doubtfully satisfactory race—this masterpiece of racial conceit of course makes nonsense of all the greatest religious experiences of man. For those experiences, one and all, require the veritable existence of a real and independent Object—eternal, perfect and utterly transcendent Spirit—as their precedent cause; and steadily demand of us not only self-improvement and self-development, but an abject humility and adoration too. . . .

They require, I think, such a twofold scheme or diagram as shall embrace both the eternal and the successive, both Being and Becoming: in the language of religion, both Grace and Nature. Holding, not as philosophic ideas, but as dimly understood yet deeply experienced acts, those completing opposites which we call the transcendent and immanent, the personal and impersonal aspects of God, the spiritually awakened soul absolutely needs, if it is to describe its felt relation with Reality, both movements. It needs the eternal, abiding Reality, its pre-existence, perfection, beatitude, and givenness; and also the serial changes in our finite selves which that all-penetrating Reality evokes. For the mystics, without ontology human life is meaningless. Dealing honestly and loyally with the material they give us, we shall be bound to confess that the trilogy of Matter, Life, and Mind, the whole immensely deepened and expanded reality we call Nature, still leaves out something which—though always partially, and never steadily—can be apprehended by man: something which is yet perfectly conveyed in the exclamation of the Psalmist: “Lord, *thou* has been our dwelling place in all generations!” All the great records of religion—whatever the language they may use—are full of this sense of the mercy, grace, generosity of the existent and living One; a Home that is a Father, and a Father that is a Home. They assert a reality truly penetrating and supporting us; and yet over against which, in all his deepest moments, man feels himself to be placed.

—*Man and the Supernatural*, 50-75

## THE THREE PHASES OF LIFE

Moreover, this is no mere question of handing on one single tradition. The mystics describe their movement from appearance to reality in many different ways, and use many incompatible religious symbols. The one constant factor is the discrimination of three phases of consciousness, no more, no less, in which we can recognize certain common characteristics. "There are," says Philo, "three kinds of life: life as it concerns God, life as it concerns the creature, and a third intermediate life, a mixture of the former two." Consistently with this, Plotinus speaks of three descending phases or principles of Divine Reality: the Godhead, or absolute and unconditioned One; its manifestation as *Nous*, the Divine Mind or Spirit which inspires the "intelligible" and eternal world; and *Psyche*, the Life or Soul of the physical Universe. Man, normally in correspondence with this physical world of succession and change, may by spiritual intuition achieve first consciousness of the eternal world of spiritual values, in which indeed the apex of his soul already dwells; and in brief moments of ecstatic vision may rise above this to communion with its source, the Absolute One. There you have the mystic's vision of the Universe, and the mystic's way of purification, enlightenment and ecstasy, bringing new and deeper knowledge of reality as the self's interest, urged by its loving desire of the Ultimate, is shifted from sense to soul, from soul to spirit. There is here no harsh dualism, no turning from a bad material world to a good spiritual world. We are invited to one gradual undivided process of sublimation, penetrating ever more deeply into the reality of the Universe, to find at last "that One who is present everywhere and absent only from those who do not perceive Him." What we behold, that we are: citizens, according to our own will and desire, of the surface world of the senses, the deeper world of life, or the ultimate world of spiritual reality.

An almost identical doctrine appears in the Upanishads. At the heart of reality is Brahma, "other than the known, and above the unknown." His manifestation is Ananda, that spiritual world which is the true object of aesthetic passion and religious contemplation. From it life and consciousness are born, in it they have their being, to it they must return. Finally, there is the world-process as we know it, which represents Ananda taking form. So too the mystic Kabir, who represents an opposition to the Vedantic philosophy, says: "From beyond the Infinite the Infinite comes, and from the Infinite the

finite extends." And again: "Some contemplate the formless and others meditate on form, but the wise man knows that Brahma is beyond both." Here we have the finite world of becoming, the infinite world of being, and Brahma, the Unconditioned Absolute, exceeding and including all. Yet, as Kabir distinctly declares again and again, there are no fences between these aspects of the Universe. When we come to the root of reality we find that "Conditioned and Unconditioned are but one word"; the difference is in our own degree of awareness.

Compare with this three of the great mediaeval Catholic mystics: that acute psychologist Richard of St. Victor, the ardent poet and contemplative Jacopone da Todi, and the profound Ruysbroeck. Richard of St. Victor says that there are three phases in the contemplative consciousness. The first is called dilation of mind, enlarging and deepening our vision of the world. The next is elevation of mind, in which we behold the realities which are above ourselves. The third is ecstasy, in which the mind is carried up to contact with truth in its pure simplicity. This is really the universe of Plotinus translated into subjective terms. So, too, Jacopone da Todi says in the symbolism of his day that three heavens are open to man. He must climb from one to the other; it is hard work, but love and longing press him on. First, when the mind has achieved self-conquest, the "starry heaven" of multiplicity is revealed to it. Its darkness is lit by scattered lights; points of reality pierce the sky. Next, it achieves the "crystalline heaven" of lucid contemplation, where the soul is conformed to the rhythm of the divine life, and by its loving intuition apprehends God under veils. Lastly, in ecstasy it may be lifted to that ineffable state which he calls the "hidden heaven," where it enjoys a vision of imageless reality and "enters into possession of all that is God." Ruysbroeck says that he has experienced three orders of reality: the natural world, theatre of our moral struggle; the essential world, where God and Eternity are indeed known, but by intermediaries; and the super-essential world, where without intermediary, and beyond all separation, "above reason and without reason," the soul is united to "the glorious and absolute One."

Take, again, a totally different mystic, Jacob Boehme. He says that he saw in the Divine Essence three principles or aspects. The first he calls "the deepest Deity, without and beyond Nature," and the next its manifestation in the Eternal Light-world. The third is that outer world in which we dwell according to the body, which is a manifestation, image or similitude of the Eternal. "And we are thus,"

he says, "to understand reality as a threefold being, or three worlds in one another." We observe again the absence of water-tight compartments. The whole of reality is present in every part of it; and the power of correspondence with all these aspects of it is latent in man. "If one sees a right man," says Boehme again, "he may say, I see here three worlds standing."

We have now to distinguish the essential element in all this. How does it correspond with psychological facts? Some mystics, like Richard of St. Victor, have frankly exhibited its subjective side and so helped us to translate the statements of their fellows. Thus Dionysius the Areopagite says in a celebrated passage: "Threefold is the way to God. The first is the way of purification, in which the mind is inclined to learn true wisdom. The second is the way of illumination, in which the mind by contemplation is kindled to the burning of love. The third is the way of union, in which the mind by understanding, reason and spirit is led up by God alone." This formula restates the Plotinian law; for the "contemplation" of Dionysius is the "spiritual intuition" of Plotinus, which inducts man to the intelligible world; his "union" is the Plotinian ecstatic vision of the One. It profoundly impressed the later Christian mystics, and has long been accepted as the classic description of spiritual growth, because it has been found again and again to answer to experience. It is therefore worth our while to examine it with some care.

—*The Essentials of Mysticism*, 8-11

## PAUL THE MYSTIC

Paul, who was the first to declare that the essence of the Christian mystery was growth and transmutation, and that the only Christian life was that which followed the curve of the human life of Christ, was himself, so far as we know, the first to exhibit this organic process of development in its fulness; and grow "from glory to glory" to man's full stature along the path which Jesus had cut for the race. "It is the leading thought of the New Testament," says Dr. Matheson,

and it is the specially prominent thought in the writings of St. Paul, that the life of the Christian Founder is repeated in the lives of His followers; that the stages of each Christian's experience are designed to be a repro-

duction of those stages by which the Son of Man passed from Bethlehem to Calvary. Paul has himself declared that the process of Christian development is a process whereby the follower of Christ is "transformed into the same image from glory to glory." No words can more adequately express his view of the nature of this new spiritual order. It is a transformation not only into the image of the master but *into that progressive form in which the image of the master unfolded itself*. The Christian is to ascend by the steps of the same ladder on which the life of the Son of Man climbed to its goal; he is to proceed from "glory to glory" . . . no man can read Paul's epistles without being impressed on every page with the predominance of this thought.

It is no new thing to claim St. Paul as a mystic; or at least as an exponent, amongst other things, of what are called "mystical" ideas. The problem of the part which such ideas play in his message has often been attacked; in various ways, leading, as one might expect, to contradictory conclusions. The other and more fundamental problem, however, of his relation to the mystic life, the Mystic Way—the history, that is to say, of his inward growth, his slow development of the transcendental consciousness—has been almost entirely neglected; and those who have come nearest to solving it, notably Matheson in *The Spiritual Development of St. Paul*, and Deissmann in *St. Paul*, have failed to see, or to set out, the many close and significant parallels which his life presents with the experiences of the Christian Founder and the Christian saints.

It might be thought that the confused and scanty records which we possess of the life of St. Paul were not sufficient to allow us to compare his psychological development with the standard diagram of man's spiritual growth. But by a comparison of the authentic epistles with the fragments of biography embedded in Acts, more can be made out than might at first be supposed. As a matter of fact, he is the supreme example of the Christian mystic: of a "change of mind" resulting in an enormous dower of vitality: of a career of impassioned activity, of "divine fecundity" second only to that of Jesus Himself. In him, the new life breaks out, shows itself in its dual aspect; the deep consciousness of Spiritual Reality which is characteristic of the contemplative nature, supporting a practical genius for concrete things. The Teresian principle, that the object of the Spiritual Marriage is the incessant production of work, received in him its most striking illustration: he was indeed "to the Eternal Goodness what his own hand is to a man." Paul's great family of spiritual children,



the train of churches ablaze with his spirit which he left in his wake, are alone enough to demonstrate that he lived upon high levels the mystic life.

—*The Mystic Way*, 157-160

## CHRIST THE MYSTIC

If we look at the acts of any great man, we invariably find that they exhibit development; though this development may be of very various kinds. The creative genius disclosed by those acts may be spiritual, ethical, artistic, mechanical—what you will; but whatever it be, it *grows*, gradually invading and subduing more and more of the elements of conscious life to its dominion. Such a growth is an essential attribute of life: and its absence makes, not for divinity, but for unreality. Now the character of Jesus, taken alone as it stands revealed in the canonical gospels, and without any theological presuppositions, certainly represents, at the very least, a personality of transcendent spiritual genius; towering in its wholeness high above even the loftiest levels of “normal” sanctity or power. This much the reverent agnostic is always willing to allow. But this human nature, this personality, is placed in Time: is immersed in the stream of Becoming. If, then, it be really human, really alive, it will share—and share in the most intense way possible—the regnant characteristic of all living things. It will move and grow. “To live is to change; and to be perfect is to have changed often.”

Since we know nothing of life apart from movement, from its ceaseless sweeping curve from birth to death, theology itself cannot afford to conceive Christ's life as emancipated from the law of growth. This would make it the miraculous emergence of the ready-made into a world of which creative effort is the soul; a static freak, absolved from that obligation of enduring through incessant change which is implicit in all life. Rather should we see in it the *élan vital* “energising enthusiastically”; raised, in the language of the vitalists, to the highest possible tension, but none the less retaining its specific character, obeying the imperative need of all life, divine and human alike, to push on, to spread, to create—the passion for perfection, the instinct for transcendence. Perhaps, when we have learned to see it thus, “miracle will no longer be a term reserved for a series of facts choicely

isolated from organic connection with nature or life; but will be best seen in the wonder and awe felt for all nature, and *perhaps specially for growth.*"

"The essence of life lies in the movement by which it is transmitted." What, then, was the movement by which this "more abundant life" was transmitted to the race?

The answer which appears to result from a careful study of the Synoptics is this: that the life of Jesus exhibits in absolute perfection—in a classic example ever to be aimed at, never to be passed—that psychological growth towards God, that movement and direction, which is found in varying degrees of perfection in the lives of the great mystics. All the characteristic experiences of a Paul, a Suso, a Teresa, are found in a heightened form in the life of their Master. They realise this fact; and, one and all, constantly appeal to that life as a witness to the reality and naturalness of their own adventures. The life of Christ, in fact, exhibits the Independent Spiritual Life being lived in perfection by the use of machinery which we all possess; in a way, then, in which we can live it, not in some miraculous unnatural way in which we cannot live it. His self-chosen title of Son of Man suggests that this, and not theological doctrine or ethical rule, forms the heart of His revelation. The few points on which we can rely, the few episodes which did certainly occur in a determined order, in the historical life of Jesus, are just those which indicate the kind of growth, and kind of experience, most characteristic of the mystic life. . . .

The three gospels, then, represent the temperamental tendencies of ecclesiastic, missionary, ascetic: and the effect of their cumulative testimony is to establish the fact that the new life which informed all these aspects of the Church's energies was primarily and fundamentally *Mystic*.

—*The Mystic Way*, 75-81

## THE JOHANNINE MYSTIC

Its author [i.e. of The Fourth Gospel], though his mind was steeped in the theology of St. Paul, and perfectly familiar with the Jewish-Hellenistic philosophy popular in his day, was primarily a mystic seer. Incident is only valuable to him in so far as it is the expression

of supersensual truth; the past is sacred to him because it foreshadows the present fruition of Reality. That which he gives to us is no historical "tradition"—Johannine or other—though sometimes he expresses it by means of traditional forms. It is the record of a new kind of life breaking out into the empirical order: a life which this Evangelist knows because he has received it in its fulness, has been "born again" to a new growth and a new world. In him we see the reaction of a new kind of temperament to that same stimulus which put St. Paul on the Mystic Way; the first appearance of certain phenomena destined to be common in the mystical experience of Christendom, but characteristic of the kind of response made by artistic and prophetic natures, rather than those of the active and volitional type, to the impact of spiritual reality.


Paul showed step by step, almost year by year, the growth that was taking place within his consciousness: the inpouring dower of new vitality received by him, the building of that "top storey" of human personality which touches the transcendent sphere. His letters are revelations of interior activity; the difficult cutting of fresh paths, the ecstatic contemplation of fresh landscapes, the breakdown of the old order, the establishment of the new.

In the Fourth Gospel we see nothing of this "process of becoming," though the life presented is the Pauline life mirrored in a different temperament. This book is written from the standpoint of one in whom the "great work" of readjustment is already accomplished; who has "entered the Kingdom" and knows himself the member of a new order, inhabited by a new life. "Of His fulness we have all *received*," says John, addressing his ideal audience of fellow-mystics: of those who have been re-born "of the Spirit" into the Kingdom of Reality. Here we have in fact not the historical, but the eternal "Gospel," seen in vision by a great spiritual genius who had realised in its deepest completest sense—as the Synoptics had not—the meaning of Christianity. This meaning, this secret, he knew—as men know the secrets of love—with a completeness far beyond the fragmentary resources of speech. Only by oblique suggestion could he convey them to us: by evoking in us something of his own intuitive power. In the fact that he is able to do this, in a degree unique in literature, lies the source of his immortal power and charm. Behind all his artistic imagery, all his prophetic rhapsodies, as behind the music of the poet, we can discern the "pressure of the Spirit"; the deeper mind struggling to give utterance to its perception of Reality. His work is not allegorical, as some critics have maintained, but sacramental:

raising to its highest power an essential character of all great art. The difficulty of criticising such a document is the old difficulty which is inherent in all mystical literature. The sword of John's spirit is cutting through experience in a new direction; and he is trying to describe some of its operations, the new tracts of reality it lays bare, in the language which we have invented to serve the ordinary job-trot piety of the normal man. Worse, since he wrote generations of sentimentalists have degraded his vivid phrases to the purposes of their own religion. Hence, few of us can now come near any accurate conception of the nature of John's passionate communion with that Reality which he called the "Logos-Christ," or guess the richness and colour of the universe in which such a consciousness as his is immersed. Every phrase that he uses, every scene which he chooses to represent, is to him a little human symbol which conveys the substance of some divine and eternal fact. Men, fighting over the tendency or historicity of the incidents in this book, have but fought over the form of the chalice, the composition of the bread, whereby John was concerned to communicate the Body and Vitality of his God.

This he could do only in so far as he had himself partaken of it: as the priest at the Christian altar must first be fed before he gives the Divine Mysteries to other men. Hence, as behind the little vivid tract of consciousness there lies the immense region of our psychic life, so one of the most complete of all experiences of the limitless "Kingdom of Heaven": an experience not only of new birth, of struggle, of attainment, but of that high permanent life of union, that impassioned and loving self-mergence in the universal life, in which the "new creature" feels himself to be a "branch" of the great tree which Life is building up: humble, yet exalted; though finite, a partaker of the Infinite; energised, not by his own separate strength, but by the sap which flows through the Whole.

—*The Mystic Way*, 218-20



MAN and HIS PLACE in the SOCIAL ORDER

***PART TWO***

## DUAL NATURE OF MAN

When St. Paul described our mysterious human nature as a "Temple of the Holy Spirit"—a created dwelling-place or sanctuary of the uncreated and invisible Divine Life—he was stating in the strongest possible terms a view of our status, our relation to God, which has always been present in Christianity; and is indeed implicit in the Christian view of Reality. But that statement as it stands seems far too strong for most of us. We do not feel in the very least like the temples of Creative Love. We are more at ease with St. Teresa, when she describes the soul as an "interior castle"—a roomy mansion, with various floors and apartments from the basement upwards; not all devoted to exalted uses, not always in a satisfactory state. And when, in a more homely mood, she speaks of her own spiritual life as "becoming solid like a house," we at last get something we can grasp.

The soul's house, the interior dwelling-place which we all possess, for the upkeep of which we are responsible—a place in which we can meet God, or from which in a sense we can exclude God—that is not too big an idea for us. Though no imagery drawn from the life of sense can ever be adequate to the strange and delicate contacts, tensions, demands and benedictions of the life that lies beyond sense: though the important part of every parable is that which it fails to express: still, here is a conception which can be made to cover many of the truths that govern the interior life of prayer.

First, we are led to consider the position of the house. However interesting and important its peculiarities may seem to the tenant, it is not as a matter of fact an unusually picturesque and interesting mansion made to an original design, and set in its own grounds with no other building in sight. Christian spirituality knows nothing of this sort of individualism. It insists that we do not inhabit detached residences, but are parts of a vast spiritual organism; that even the most hidden life is never lived for itself alone. Our soul's house forms part of the vast City of God. Though it may not be an important mansion with a frontage on the main street, nevertheless it shares all the obligations and advantages belonging to the city as a whole. It gets its water from the main, and its light from the general supply. The way we maintain and use it must have reference to our civic responsibilities. . . .

So into all the affairs of the little house there should enter a certain



sense of the city, and beyond this of the infinite world in which the city stands: some awe-struck memory of our double situation, at once so homely and so mysterious. We must each maintain unimpaired our unique relation with God; yet without forgetting our intimate contact with the rest of the city, or the mesh of invisible life which binds all the inhabitants in one. . . .

Next, what type of house does the soul live in? It is a two-story house. . . . We know that we have a ground floor, a natural life biologically conditioned, with animal instincts and affinities; and that this life is very important, for it is the product of the divine creativity—its builder and maker is God. But we know too that we have an upper floor, a supernatural life, with supernatural possibilities, a capacity for God; and that this, man's peculiar prerogative, is more important still. If we try to live on one floor alone we destroy the mysterious beauty of our human vocation; so utterly a part of the fugitive and creaturely life of this planet and yet so deeply coloured by Eternity; so entirely one with the world of nature, and yet, "in the Spirit," a habitation of God. . . .

Therefore a full and wholesome spiritual life can never consist in living upstairs, and forgetting to consider the ground floor and its homely uses and needs; thus ignoring the humbling fact that those upper rooms are entirely supported by it. Nor does it consist in the constant, exasperated investigation of the shortcomings of the basement. When St. Teresa said that her prayer had become "solid like a house," she meant that its foundations now went down into the lowly but firm ground of human nature, the concrete actualities of the natural life: and on those solid foundations, its walls rose up towards heaven. The strength of the house consisted in that intimate welding together of the divine and the human, which she found in its perfection in the humanity of Christ. There, in the common stuff of human life which He blessed by His presence, the saints have ever seen the homely foundations of holiness. Since we are two-story creatures, called to a natural and a supernatural status, both sense and spirit must be rightly maintained, kept in order, consecrated to the purposes of the city, if our full obligations are to be fulfilled. The house is built for God; to reflect, on each level, something of His unlimited Perfection. Downstairs that general rightness of adjustment to all this-world obligations, which the ancients called the quality of Justice; and the homely virtues of Prudence, Temperance and Fortitude reminding us of our creatureliness, our limitations, and so humbling and disciplining us. Upstairs, the heavenly powers of

Faith, Hope and Charity; tending towards the Eternal, nourishing our life towards God, and having no meaning apart from God. . . .

That means, reduced to practice, that the whole house with its manifold and graded activities must be a house of prayer. It does not mean keeping a Quiet Room to which we can retreat, with mystical pictures on the walls, and curtains over the windows to temper the disconcerting intensity of the light; a room where we can forget the fact that there are black beetles in the kitchen, and that the range is not working very well. Once we admit any violent contrast between the upper and lower floor, the "instinctive" and "spiritual" life, or feel a reluctance to investigate the humbling realities of the basement, our life becomes less, not more, than human; and our position is unsafe. Are we capable of the adventure of courage which inspires the great prayer of St. Augustine: "The house of my soul is narrow; do Thou enter in and enlarge it! It is ruinous; do Thou repair it"? Can we risk the visitation of the mysterious Power that will go through all our untidy rooms, showing up their shortcomings and their possibilities; reproving by the tranquillity of order the waste and muddle of our inner life? The mere hoarded rubbish that ought to go into the dust-bin; the things that want mending and washing; the possessions we have never taken the trouble to use? Yet this is the only condition on which man can participate in that fullness of life for which he is made.

The Lord's Prayer, in which St. Teresa said that she found the whole art of contemplation from its simple beginning to its transcendent goal, witnesses with a wonderful beauty and completeness to this two-story character of the soul's house; and yet its absolute unity. It begins at the top, in the watch tower of faith, with the sublime assertion of our supernatural status—the one relation, intimate yet inconceivable, that governs all the rest—"Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be *Thy* name." . . .

Thence, step by step, this prayer brings us downstairs, goes with us through the whole house; bringing the supernatural into the natural, blessing and sanctifying, cleansing and rectifying every aspect of the home. "*Thy* Kingdom come!" Hope—trustful expectation. "*Thy* will be done!" Charity—the loving union of our wills with the Infinite Will. Then the ground floor. "Give us this day"—that food from beyond ourselves which nourishes and sustains our life. Forgive all our little failures and excesses, neutralize the corroding power of our conflicts, disharmonies, rebellions, sins. We can't deal with them alone. Teach us, as towards our fellow citizens, to share

that generous tolerance of God. Lead us not into situations where we are tried beyond our strength; but meet us on the battlefield of personality, and protect the weakness of the adolescent spirit against the downward pull of the inhabitants of the lower floor.

And then, the reason of all this; bringing together, in one supreme declaration of joy and confidence, the soul's sense of that supporting, holy, and eternal Reality who is the Ruler and the Light of the city, and of every room in every little house. *Thine* is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory. If our interior life be subdued to the spirit of this prayer, with its rich sense of our mighty heritage and child-like status, our total dependence on the Reality of God, then the soul's house is truly running well. Its action is transfused by contemplation. The door is open between the upper and the lower floor; the life of spirit and life of sense.

—*Concerning the Inner Life*, 65-73

## THE SAINT AND SOCIETY

A deep intuition prompts these saints to labours, renunciations and sufferings which seem meaningless to the "natural" man; but by which they are sure that genuine work is done. Though social Christianity is far from telling all the truth about the supernatural life, and must never be allowed to discredit the high calling to an exclusive adoration and contemplation of God, nevertheless no saint—even the loneliest—is merely a self-cultivator. He is always self-given to some objective beyond the boundary of his own soul, and lives because of this concentration upon spirit a wider, richer and more creative—not a more aloof and constructed—life than other men. Sanctification means the universalizing of the creature's will and love; their dedication to the interests of Reality. Thus, if the prayer of adoration and communion brings man to an ever deeper consciousness of his own faulty nature—obliges him to work with God in the supernaturalizing of his own selfhood by the secret labours of self-conquest—this call to purgation of character is only the first point in the real sanctifying of personality. Sooner or later he will realize that this reformation is being effected for a purpose; in order that he may co-operate in the workings of the Supernatural on and in other souls. . . .

Here we surely touch the deepest truth known to us concerning the mystery of man's supernatural life: his redemptive and creative power. We see that the very existence of this power requires of the awakened soul, if it is to grow to its full stature, not only penitence but also intercessory action: and not only an individual, but also a social relation with the supernatural world. That soul has a double obligation; to a total and solitary response to God, however felt, and to a share in the common life and mutual service of the Body which Spirit indwells within the temporal world. Hence not only "Prayer" but also "Church"—not only secret adoration, but also corporate worship—is necessary to the full expression of its life. The invisible, but most actual, incorporation of all such awakened souls in one Supernatural Society embracing life and death, past and present, in its span: this is what Christianity means by the Communion of Saints. . . .

Thus the co-operation with the Eternal to which the awakened spirit of man is called can be thought of under three heads: Personal Transformation, Intercession, Incorporation. Through the constant interaction of these three factors, the differing contributions made by each different soul to each, the Communion of Saints is created, maintained, and does its work. One character runs through all three, everywhere latent, but for the Christian theist patent; namely, the principle of costly redemption. The first point has as its assigned end the sanctifying of character, the production of a full-grown, fully supernaturalized, creative personality capable of redeeming work. Here the human will co-operates with the energy of God in the work of transmuting human nature; remoulding the plastic psyche nearer to the heart's desire. On the degree in which this transmutation is effected in each individual depends the worth of his or her spiritual work; the contribution made by it to the corporate life. Yet we observe that this secret co-operation of will and grace is seldom if ever effected in isolation. The supporting love and will of his fellows—intercession: the discipline and shelter of an institution and the tradition which it conserves—Church: these, in some form or degree, seem essential factors in the fullest transfiguration of man. Where they are apparently absent—e.g.—the first in the emergence of a lonely spiritual genius such as Jacob Boehme or William Blake, the second in such unchurched sanctity as that of George Fox—careful inspection will commonly reveal their remote influence. The most independent, even the most illiterate, saint cannot elude all contact with those truths which the Church exists to proclaim. Thus Boehme, Blake, the early

Quakers, were all fed not only by the Scriptures, but by mystical writers depending on Catholic tradition: whilst no believer in the effectiveness of spiritual action, the reality of that wide-spreading love which is poured out in intercessory prayer, can limit its possible sphere of influence to souls who wittingly receive its gifts.

We must hold, then, that God, the Supernatural, acts through personality and through history, from without and from within, by external influence and by personal striving, in the production of His Saints. What is a Saint? A particular individual completely redeemed from self-occupation; who, because of this, is able to embody and radiate a measure of Eternal Life. His whole life, personal, social, intellectual, mystical, is lived in supernatural regard. What is he for? To help, save, and enlighten by his loving actions and contemplations; to oppose in one way or another, by suffering, prayer and work upon heroic levels of love and self-oblation, the mysterious downward drag within the world which we call sin. He is a tool of the Supernatural, a "chosen vessel, of the redeeming, transforming, creative love of God."...

Individual and group, then, are called, not to a rejection of the sense-world, but to its transmutation; to permeate the greatest number of successive acts, the widest area of relationships, with the living Spirit of the Infinite. Both church and soul retreat from the world only that they may in some way return to it. They must balance recollection by action, asceticism by love. The raw material to be supernaturalized is mostly found in the common ways of life. But the power of dealing with that raw material, the deep certitude in which such dealing becomes possible—these are only fully achieved in those periods of exclusive attention to God in which the growing spirit, whether alone or with its fellows, turns from succession and breathes the bracing atmosphere of the Eternal World.

—*Man and the Supernatural*, 214-19

## LIFE OF THE SPIRIT AND SOCIAL ORDER

Plainly, we are called upon to strive with all our power to bring in the Kingdom; that is, to incarnate in the time-world the highest spiritual values which we have known. But our ability to do this is strictly dependent on those values being known, at least by some of us, at

firsthand; and for this first-hand perception, as we have seen, the soul must have a measure of solitude and silence. Therefore, if the swing-over to a purely social interpretation of religion be allowed to continue unchecked, the result can only be an impoverishment of our spiritual life; quite as far-reaching and as regrettable as that which follows from an unbridled individualism. Without the inner life of prayer and meditation, lived for its own sake and for no utilitarian motive, neither our judgments upon the social order nor our active social service will be perfectly performed; because they will not be the channel of Creative Spirit expressing itself through us in the world of to-day.

Christ, it is true, gives nobody any encouragement for supposing that a merely self-cultivating sort of spirituality, keeping the home fires burning and so on, is anybody's main job. The main job confided to His friends is the preaching of the Gospel. That is, spreading Reality, teaching it, inserting it into existence; by prayers, words, acts, and also if need be by manual work, and always under the conditions and symbolisms of our contemporary world. But since we can only give others that which we already possess, this presupposes that we have got something of Reality as a living, burning fire in ourselves. The soul's two activities of reception and donation must be held in balance, or impotence and unreality will result. It is only out of the heart of his own experience that man really helps his neighbour: and thus there is an ultimate social value in the most secret responses of the soul to grace. No one, for instance, can help others to repentance who has not known it at first-hand. . . .

We cannot read St. Paul's letters with sympathy and escape the conviction that in the midst of his great missionary efforts he was profoundly concerned too with the problems of his own inner life. The little bits of self-revelation that break into the epistles and, threaded together, show us the curve of his growth, also show us how much lay behind them, how intense and how exacting was the inward travail that accompanied his outward deeds. Here he is representative of the true apostolic type. It is because St. Augustine is the man of the *Confessions* that he is also the creator of *The City of God*. The regenerative work of St. Francis was accompanied by an unremitting life of penitence and recollection. Fox and Wesley, abounding in labours, yet never relaxed the tension of their souls' effort to correspond with a transcendent Reality. These and many other examples warn us that only by such a sustained and double



movement can the man of the Spirit actualize all his possibilities and do his real work. . . .

Here then, as in so much else, the ideal is not an arbitrary choice but a struck balance. First, a personal contact with Eternal Reality, deepening, illuminating and enlarging all our experience of fact, all our responses to it: that is, faith. Next, the fullest possible sense of our membership of and duty towards the social organism, a completely rich, various, heroic, self-giving, social life: that is, charity. The dissociation of these two sides of human experience is fatal to that divine hope which should crown and unite them; and which represents the human instinct for novelty in a sublimated form.

It is of course true that social groups may be regenerated. The success of such group-formations as the primitive Franciscans, the Friends of God, the Quakers, the Salvation Army, demonstrates this. But groups, in the last resort, consist of individuals, who must each be regenerated one by one; whose outlook, if they are to be whole men, must include in its span abiding values as well as the stream of time, and who, for the full development of this their twofold destiny, require each a measure both of solitude and of association. . . .

Let us look back for a moment at some of our conclusions about the individual life. We said that this life, if fully lived, exhibited the four characters of work and contemplation, self-discipline and service: deepening and incarnating within its own various this-world experience its other-world apprehensions of Eternity, of God. Its temper should thus be both social and ascetic. It should be doubly based, on humility and on given power. Now the social order—more exactly, the social organism—in which Spirit is really to triumph, can only be built up of individuals who do with a greater or less perfection and intensity exhibit these characters, some upon independent levels of creative freedom, some on those of discipleship; for here all men are not equal, and it is humbug to pretend that they are. This social order, being so built of regenerate units, would be dominated by these same implicits of the regenerate consciousness; and would tend to solve in their light the special problems of community life. And this unity of aim would really make of it one body; the body of a fully socialized *and* fully spiritualized humanity, which perhaps we might without presumption describe as indeed the son of God.

The life of such a social organism, its growth, its cycle of corporate behaviour, would be strung on that same fourfold cord which combined the desires and deeds of the regenerate self into a series:

## MAN AND HIS PLACE IN THE SOCIAL ORDER

namely, Penitence, Surrender, Recollection and Work. It would be actuated first by a real social repentance. . . .

Finally, the work which is done by a community of which the inner life is controlled by these three factors will be the concrete expression of these factors in the time-world; and will perpetuate and hand on all that is noble, stable and reasonable in human discovery and tradition, whether in the sphere of conduct, of thought, of creation, of manual labour, or of the control of nature, whilst remaining supple towards the demands and gifts of novelty. New value will be given to craftsmanship and a sense of dedication—now almost unknown—to those who direct it. Consider the effect of this attitude on worker, trader, designer, employer: how many questions would then answer themselves, how many sore places would be healed. . . .

A wide-spreading love to all in common, says Ruysbroeck in a celebrated passage, is the authentic mark of a truly spiritual man.

—*The Life of the Spirit and the Life of To-day*, 207-226

## BALANCE BETWEEN YOUR OUTER AND INNER LIFE

Epiphany, 1935

I think now, that one of the things you've got, quite gradually, to aim at, is some kind of harmony or balance between your outer and inner life, otherwise the strain will become too much. Plainly you are required at present to live both lives; and so in both you can aim at God, though in different ways. I think you have to learn not to pour yourself out too much in outward activities, relationships, etc., but maintain a certain reserve. This is an awfully important thing for one's inner peace; but it takes a lot of doing, so you must expect it to be a slow job. It is really of course an aspect of detachment—you are to love much and give yourself much and *yet* maintain an independence of soul, fully given to *nothing* but God. When you have got this inner stability you won't be so much troubled by that painful shrinking from people and external action; nor will these things spoil your prayer (when they are part of your job) because you won't lose yourself in them. But some degree of pain and loneliness you are sure to have. Try to arrange things so that you can have a reasonable bit of quiet every day and do not be scrupulous and think it

selfish to make a decided struggle for this. You are obeying God's call and giving Him the opportunity to teach you what He wants you to know, and so make you more useful to Him and other souls.

Your letter sounds as if you had got a wee bit strained and fussy. Remember that "the Holy Spirit works always in tranquillity" and even the most devout fuss is not any good to Him. at all. There will inevitably be great tension between the natural and supernatural sides of your life, yet even this must be drowned in the peace of God. I'm afraid this sounds very muddling but you will pick out what you want.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 240-41

## KEEP HUMAN CONTACT ALIVE

May 14, 1930

It has been in my mind for some little time to write to you and say how much I hope you are getting on all right and *not* concentrating too fiercely on religious problems! I feel with you, especially just at present, that it is most necessary to keep your human, non-theological contacts and interests supple and alive. Kindly acts of service, firm discipline of your tendency to judge other people, to look at them and their views critically, etc., and all kinds of humble work in which you can forget yourself, are all things which will do most to make your soul fit to realize Christ. So do keep up all your general interests, mix with people, love them, but don't try to "do them good" or discuss religion with them! All this will make a better preparation for your Retreat than reading religious books and thinking of your soul. If any of your work is uncongenial, seize on that and do it with special zest as something you can offer to God, and act on the same lines with people. The Retreat is only a fortnight off now, and then I shall look forward to seeing you.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 188-89

## THE USE OF THE SENSES

July 29, 1908

The first point is—do you wish to develop in yourself (1) “balanced faculties” or (2) to be a “specialist”? If (1), then utter repression of the senses is obviously wrong, and indeed impossible to those who live the active life at *all*. If (2), then such repressions *may* be right for entirely exceptional souls. But please note that the great contemplative saints are not found amongst such souls. Remember St. Francis with his love of birds and music, sun and air: St. Teresa’s eau-de-Cologne: Ruysbroeck’s and St. Bernard’s passion for the forest. As to what you say about the cloistered life, I don’t know whether you have ever known any nuns or monks personally? I know a good many and as a matter of fact, they live the life of the senses just as much as anyone else, only in a peculiarly simple and detached way. If you want to find the person who combines spiritual passion with appreciation of a cup of coffee—go to a convent. It is just there that you find this type in perfection. I believe the whole secret to lie in “detachment”: and it is difficult to conceive how anyone who has once seen the “vision splendid” even for a moment can fail to have this detachment in some measure, or fail to see bits of it, hints and shadows, in most of the evidences of sense. I think that the R.L.S. point of view, *lit by this experience*, may be spiritual; *not* lit by it—it is only a sort of cosmic cheerfulness and rather shallow at that!

The Church has always, of course, held up as the Christian ideal a mixture of the active and contemplative life—the one lit up by the other. Our Lord’s human life was just that, wasn’t it? Social intercourse regulated by nights spent in the mountain in prayer. We *ought* to be strong enough to use our senses without letting them swamp our souls; to enjoy them, without ever forgetting the greater joy of the “deep yet dazzling darkness.”

The condemnation of “*lust of the eyes*” seems to me to just point the distinction between lust and reasonable love. Just as, in the same way, it is right to love other people *in* the Love of God—but not to have violent and exclusive passions for them. This shuts off the spiritual light just as completely as an attack of hatred and malice! I am sure that nothing which can co-exist with the consciousness of the spiritual world hurts us—and it seems to me that all pure beauty can so co-exist if we choose. Of course in moments of meditation (and

indeed, I think, of prayer) all sensual images are in the way. But even in the cloister, unitive prayer *cannot* be continuous. A rightly detached soul can "switch off" the world of sense at those times without despising it. The two things are so *very* near together. So that it is the "garment that ye see Him by"—if you know Him first. And, as pain is plaited right through nature and supernature as we know it, I don't see that this longing to hurt oneself (it *can* become hysterical if not looked after, as I know to my cost, so beware!) militates against the other part. . . .

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 78-80

## ON PRUDENCE

Prudence, on the natural level so suggestive of a self-centered carefulness, the miserable policy of "safety first," only achieves dignity and beauty when thus raised to the spiritual status, and related to our life in God. Then it is revealed as the virtue which governs and sublimates all behaviour; as Temperance is the virtue which governs and sublimates desire. We owe to St. Thomas the noblest and deepest of all definitions of Prudence. For him, all virtues, all the soul's sources of energy, are forms and expressions of one thing—Love, the self's will and desire, in the ascending degrees of preference, interest, longing and devotedness, set towards God and the will of God. And conversely, all sin is due to something gone wrong with that same sacred power of energetic love; its direction to wrong objectives. Sin is "a withdrawal from the art of Divine Wisdom and the order of Divine Love": a wilful setting of our own small lives, hopes and loves out of line with the vast purposes of God. The right ordering of its innate powers of love and will is therefore all the soul has to do to actualize its inheritance, make it fit for God. *Ordina quest' amore, o tu che m'ami*. Then, the soul's house is ready for its guest. And Prudence, says St. Thomas again, is this Love "choosing between what helps and what hinders"—choosing what helps the fulfilment of God's will, and leaving what hinders the fulfilment of that will; because He is the soul's love. It is the dedicated use of the great human power of choice, its subjection to the rule of charity: the right ordering of the natural life in the interests, not of one's own preference or advancement, but of the city and the city's King. . . .

The mind awakened to spiritual reality often needs much self-control, much prudence, if it is to put the truth it has acquired—usually very little—so generally and so genially that there is no risk of giving anyone a spiritual shock, or the chance of spiritual gastritis. All teachers have to learn with St. Paul to subordinate their own vision to their pupils' needs; feeding babies with milk because they need milk, whilst suppressing the disheartening information that there is a more complete diet in the cupboard. Prudence proves her love as much by what she withholds as by what she gives: humbly and patiently adapting her method to the capacity of each. She never bewilders, dazzles, little growing souls; never overfeeds or drags them out of their depth. The cakes upon her tea-table are suited to the digestion of the guests.

Prudence further requires the careful handling of our own lives and capacities; instruments given us by God, and destined to be mirrors of His skill. It means choosing what helps, and rejecting what hinders, the fulfilment of that design, that vocation, which is already present in embryo in our souls. This subjection of behaviour to the ultimate purpose of God may mean on one hand conduct which seems absurdly over-careful; or on the other, conduct which seems imprudent to the last degree. The truly prudent, love-impelled choices of the saints, are often in the eyes of the world the extreme of foolishness. St. Simeon Stylites, making his pillar higher and higher in his quest of that solitude to which he knew that he was called; St. Francis stripping off all that impeded his love, even to his very clothes, and going out to destitution; St. Catherine of Genoa, forcing herself to repulsive duties because they helped to kill fastidiousness, and make her self-oblivious love more complete; Father Damien, choosing the certitude of a leper's death; Father Wainwright, deliberately going without a midday meal for years, because love made him want to share the privations of those he served—all these are the actions of celestial prudence. Prudence, not preference, took St. Teresa to the convent. She did not like the cloister, but she knew herself called by God; and chose that which helped to fulfil His will for her soul. Prudence locked the door of Lady Julian's cell, but sent Mary Slessor from the Scottish mill to the African jungle; took Foucauld to the solitude of the Sahara, Livingstone to Africa, Grenfell to Labrador.

Love chooses the work it can do, not the work that it likes. Prudent love took St. Thomas from contemplation, and made him the teacher of the schools. Prudent love does not insist on being a philanthropist when it lacks the warm outgoing temperament that is needed, and is

decisively called to the more lonely but not less essential vocation of studying the deep things of God. It uses the material given it in the best possible way; and thus doing, makes its appointed contribution to that eternal plan which requires the perfect active surrender of the willing creature, the making of all choices and performance of all tasks in subservience to that God Who is Pure Act—the total consecration of natural life. . . .

Now Prudence is a positive, not a negative, principle of action. It requires behaviour, not abstention from behaviour. It rejects the lower, in order that it may be free to accept the higher choice. Thus our dominant attraction is in the eyes of Prudence as important as our dominant temptation: it may be the magnet by which we are being drawn to the place we have to fill. The creative method completes detachment by attachment: "Leave all" requires as its corollary "Follow me."

—*Concerning the Inner Life*, 74-86

## ON TEMPERANCE

Temperance, then, is the teacher of that genial humility which is an essential of spiritual health. It makes us realize that the normal and moderate course is the only one we can handle successfully in our own power: that extraordinary practices, penances, spiritual efforts, with their corresponding graces, must never be deliberately sought. Some people appear to think that the "spiritual life" is a peculiar condition mainly supported by cream ices and corrected by powders. But the solid norm of the spiritual life should be like that of the natural life: a matter of porridge, bread and butter, and a cut off the joint. The extremes of joy, discipline, vision, are not in our hands, but in the Hand of God. We can maintain the soul's house in order without any of these. It is not the best housekeeper who has the most ferocious spring-clean, or gets in things from the confectioner when she is expecting guests. "If any man open the door, I will come in to him"; share his ordinary meal, and irradiate his ordinary life. The demand for temperance of soul, for an acknowledgment of the sacred character of the normal, is based on that fact—the central Christian fact—of the humble entrance of God into our common human life. The supernatural can and does seek and find us, in and



through our daily normal experience: the invisible in the visible. There is no need to be peculiar in order to find God. The Magi were taught by the heavens to follow a star; and it brought them, not to a paralysing disclosure of the Transcendent, but to a little Boy on His mother's knee.

So too we observe how moderate, humble, attuned to the scale of our daily life are all the crucial events of the New Testament. Seen from the outside, none could have guessed their shattering and transfiguring power. The apocalyptists looked for a superhuman being "coming in the clouds"—they could not escape from the idea of the abnormal—but the real events which transformed the spiritual history of man were startling only in their simplicity. The quiet routine of a childhood and working life in Nazareth; the wandering ministry of teaching and compassion, with the least possible stress laid on supernatural powers; the homely little triumph of Palm Sunday; the pitiful sufferings of an arrest and execution too commonplace to disturb the city's life. Christ never based His claim on strangeness: it is by what He is, rather than by what He does, that He awes, attracts, amazes. . . .

First, in relation to others Temperance requires a quiet refusal to capitulate to feverish and distracting emotions; intense attractions and intense hostilities. It means a tempering of ground-floor passions to the needs of the upstairs life; that check upon vehement impulse, that ordering of love, which involves its absolute dissociation from claimfulness, clutch and excess. The love which the Saints pour out is a gentle and genial sunshine; never fierce, concentrated, intemperate. Those who come to the soul's house should find it nicely warmed all over; its inner chamber must not be like one of those rooms which have a fierce little gas stove in one corner, and a deadly chill everywhere else. *Custodia cordis*, the secret of an ordered life, involves the maintenance of an even temperature; and a refusal to rush out upon a flood of inordinate feeling towards certain persons, deeds and things, instead of taking what comes to us tranquilly, with a light hand.

Again, theological views, and political loyalties, must all be subject to the rule of temperance; killing presumption, intolerance and the spirit of controversy, acknowledging at each point the fragmentary and relative character of all human knowledge and therefore the peril and absurdity of absolute judgments and scornful criticisms of the opinions of other men. So too the restless, energetic desire to get things done, the impetuous determination to remodel the world nearer to our own hearts' desire, the exaggerated importance we attribute

to our own action, the emphasis placed on doing, to the detriment of being—all this must be mortified if calm and order are to rule the lower floor. . . .

Next, we are called to be temperate as regards the standard by which we estimate ourselves; which must neither be too degraded nor too exalted for our status. We are neither angels nor devils, but half-achieved, unstable creatures; alternately pulled towards the higher and the lower life. Temperance, therefore, will not judge the state of our house by its ground floor alone or its upper rooms alone; but by both. The ground floor, to the very end, will partake of the imperfection of nature. It is good and humbling that this should be so: and we should bring a certain genial patience to acceptance of the facts, bearing evenly our own uneven performances. Our part is to manage the household wisely, without overstraining its resources; if we do, it will have its revenge. So we are required to be reasonable both in what we refuse to nature and what we demand from it; temperate in renunciation as well as enjoyment, in supersensible as well as sensible activities. The spiritual life constantly draws upon the resources of the natural life; much nervous energy is used in prayer, especially absorbed or difficult prayer. Therefore we should treat our limited powers with reverence, avoiding wasteful overstrain. Further, we should arrange our housework on a reasonable plan: not letting ourselves in for a whole day's scrubbing, and then in our desperation resorting to strong soda and harsh soap. After all, the interior life needs no sensational measures. It requires only our gentle and faithful collaboration with God, in fitting the human nature He has given us for Him; gradually making the whole house ready for that Spirit which is tranquillity and peace.

—*Concerning the Inner Life*, 87-97

## THE VICE OF SPIRITUAL PRIDE

March 17, 1909

To the alarming list of innate vices which you have managed to get together I should like to add another: Pride. All this preoccupation with your own imperfection is not humility, but an insidious form of spiritual pride. What do you *expect* to be? A saint? There are desperately few of them: and even they found that faults, which are the raw

material of sanctity remember, take a desperate lot of working up. You know best when and how you fall into these various pitfalls. Try and control yourself when you see the temptation coming (*sometimes* you will succeed, which is so much to the good). Pull yourself up and make an act of contrition when you catch yourself doing any of the things. *Never* allow yourself to be pessimistic about your own state. Look outwards instead of inwards: and when you are inclined to be depressed and think you are getting on badly, make an act of thanksgiving instead, because others are getting on well. The object of your salvation is God's Glory, not your happiness. Remember it is all one to the angels whether you or another give Him the holiness He demands.

So, be content to help on His kingdom, remaining yourself in the lowest place. Merge yourself in the great life of the Christian family. Make intercessions, work for it, keep it in your mind. You have tied yourself up so tight in that accursed individualism of yours—the source of *all* your difficulties—that it is a marvel you can breathe at all.

I hope you are going to get hold of a little personal work amongst the poor when you can? As for the inclination to cut connection with other people, *that* must be fought tooth and nail, please. Go out as much as you can, and enter into the interests of others, however twaddley. They are all part of life, remember: and life, for you, is *divine*.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill, 96-97*

## ON FORTITUDE

What is the final need of our ground-floor premises, if they are to bear the weight of the upper story; the thrust and pressure of the supernatural life? The Saints reply, with one voice: Fortitude, strength, staying-power! To be "established, strengthened, settled"—not etherealized, exalted, illuminated—is St. Peter's supreme desire for his converts. It is the sober ambition of a realist who has known in his own person the disasters that await a fervour based on feeling rather than will. The perfect work of Prudence and Temperance is to make our natural humanity "strong in the Lord"; so establish the soul's house on the rock, and make its walls solid, that it can carry

those strange upper works which are part of the builder's design. . . .

We need fortitude if we are to accept with quietness the sharp blows and persistent sandpapering which bring our half-finished fittings up to the standard required by the city's plan. But it is this steady endurance, born of the humble sense that everything which happens matters, yet only matters because it mediates God, and offers a never to be repeated opportunity of improving our correspondence with God, which more and more makes the house fit to be a habitation of the Spirit. It is not a week-end cottage. It must be planned and organized for life, the whole of life, not for fine weather alone. Hence strong walls and dry cellars matter more than many balconies or interesting garden design.

The winds will blow and the floods come to the very end; overwhelming events, wild gales of feeling and impulse, will sweep round the walls. The doors will bang and windows rattle. The bitter, cold and penetrating waters of disappointment and grief will rise. But the little house will stand firm, if it is established on the solid rock of spiritual realism; not the soft easily-dug ground of spiritual sentiment. Its foundations must go down into the invisible world of prayer: something of the steadfastness of the Unchanging must underlie our human changefulness. The balance between the different parts, with their compensating thrusts and strains, must keep the walls true. If one becomes excessive, and pushes too much, the house may fall.

That the soul's self-giving prayer and work should be really costly and difficult, should call for the putting out of a definite degree of effort, should involve a certain tension and even pain—all this is surely good. The job that is done quite easily is seldom done quite well. . . . Fortitude means the achievement, even on the natural level, of an inward stability which transcends the world of change. The small size of our premises matters little, if the walls are weather-proof and stand firm.

Such fortitude is not the virtue of the dashing soldier. It means rather the virtue of the keeper of the fortress; the inconspicuous heroism that sits tight. And in the life of the spirit there is a great deal of sitting tight; of refusing to be frightened out of it or decoyed away from it; of refusing to despair, waiting till the weather improves, till business gets brisker, day breaks, the shadows lift. We must endure a mysterious pressure, which operates more often and more purely in darkness than in light. We cannot take up the soul's privileges and responsibilities as a householder of the Spiritual City, merely by paying one instalment and getting immediate delivery of all the

goods we desire, with an insurance policy protecting us from risk; so that there is nothing to do but settle down cosily in our freshly furnished rooms. That citizenship is the beginning of a new life; a total sublimation of experience, in which all life's tensions and possibilities are raised to a higher term. More demand on prudence and initiative, keener struggle than before; a new capacity for joy, but also a new capacity for pain. It means incorporation in that Mystical Body, through which the awful saving power of God is poured out on the world: and taking our small share in filling up the measure of those sufferings by which alone redeeming work is done. The Holy City stands on a rock; but in the midst of a world of sin and pain. And the price of citizenship, as regards contact with that world, is likely to include suffering and loneliness, much misunderstanding, much self-giving with little apparent result. It may go further, and require that entire and pure act of resignation, that self-oblation even to the uttermost, which was once accomplished in Gethsemane, and remains the clue to the whole redeeming and creative life. The soul needs Fortitude, if it is to take up that great vocation.

Baron von Hügel speaks gratefully in one of his letters of "My little old life which God has *deigned* to train by not a few trials." It is this deeply grateful recognition of the Divine action, as specially discovered in those disciples and sufferings which teach Fortitude to the soul, and toughen it to take its share in the sacrificial action of the Body of Christ, which distinguishes from the devotee the truly awakened spirit, the living acting member of the Communion of Saints. An uncalculating surrender of our own premises to the general purpose, losing all individual preferences and reluctances in the vast outlines of God's mysterious design, is the condition of that membership: and to be able to make this willed surrender, is the most solemn dignity of the human soul. It means a sober willingness to renounce all spiritual enjoyments, in order to take up the burden of the world's wrongness; put up in our own persons with the results. All must suffer; the lesson of Christianity is what can be done with suffering when it is met with self-oblivious courage and love. . . .

Certainly our own preliminary effort and struggle are needed. Fortitude does not merely consist in waiting about; but in a real bracing of the will to courageous action. It is to him that overcometh, that the fruit of the Tree of Life is given. "Will and grace rise and fall together." Ghostly strength is like one of those funds to which the Government adds 1 for every pound subscribed voluntarily. It is the reward of really trying to do or bear something for God; not

of wanting to do or bear something. As even the most impressive view from the hotel terrace tells nothing of the real secret of the mountains, which is only imparted to those who will turn their backs on comfort, take the risks; so the passive appreciation of the spiritual landscape, the agreeable reading of mystical books—fruit of the courage and love of other souls, but making no demand on ours—gives us no genuine contact with the things of God. We must put on our own boots, face the early start and long slow plod through the lower pastures, where the mountains are seldom in view—make a rule of life, and practise it in the teeth of reluctance and discouragement—if we want to share the life of the mountaineer; know the strange rapture of communion with the everlasting hills. . . .

We see again and again in the lives of the Saints how constant and definite is the demand made on this courage and endurance; which is the natural expression of their heroic, unlimited, supernatural love. It is by way of the difficulties, sufferings and humiliations of the natural life that they cure the soft human horror of the austere side of the spiritual life, test and brace their growing spirits, make them capable of its full privileges and responsibilities.

—*Concerning the Inner Life*, 99-107

## ON FAITH

Faith—often so cheaply equated with mere belief—is something far more than this. It is the soul's watchtower; a solitary place at the top of a steep flight of stairs. Those stairs, for some souls, have almost the character of the Way of the Cross; so humbling are the falls, so disconcerting the evidence of our human weakness, so absolute the stripping, and so complete the sacrifice which is asked as the price of the ascent. Bit by bit, all the wrappings of sensitive nature must be left behind. And even for those to whom the way lies open, and of whom this utter denudation is not asked, it is sometimes a great effort to go up. The stairs are steep; we are, or think that we are, very busy. We know that if we do go, it must be with purified sight clear of prejudice and of distracting passions, empty of our selves; for only in emptiness of spirit, as Ruysbroeck says, can we receive that Incomprehensible Light which is "nothing else but a fathomless gazing and seeing." With so little leisure and so languid an inclination, it seems

better to mutter a few prayers whilst we tidy the kitchen; content ourselves with the basement view of the world, and rationalize this interior laziness as humility of soul.

But if we do make the effort needed for that ascent, what a revelation! Busy on the ground floor, we never realized that we had a place like this; that our small house shot up so high into Heaven. We find ourselves, as it were, in a little room with a window on each side. There is no guarantee as to what any one soul will see out of those windows, for there is always far more to see than we can apprehend. . . . The upper room is more than a devotional sun-trap. Faith seeks the enlightenment of the understanding, whatever pain comes with it; and shirks no truth, however bewildering, which is shown to it by God. It means a share in the outlook of one who rejoiced in spirit, yet was sorrowful even unto death; whose rich experience embraced spiritual vision and spiritual darkness too. The variations of the weather, then, should never control our faith. . . .

The northward view is a view of infinite spaces—a wild and solemn landscape over against us, which seems without meaning for the little lives of men—a desert country full of strange beauty, which leads the eye outward to the horizon; and shows it, at an awful distance, the peaks of great mountains hanging in the air. Here the soul looks out with adoration to the vast uncharted continent of the Divine. . . .

We turn to the window on the other side of Faith's tower. That looks out upon our homely, natural, changeful world. It shows us human life, conditions, problems, from the angle of faith; and the mystery of the Eternal self-revealed in human ways. That too is a wonderful and inspiring sight, enlightening the understanding. Though clouds pass over that landscape, storms come, seasons change, it is yet seen to be full of God's glory. The same unchanging light and life bathes the world we see out of each window. Jungle and city, church and market-place, the most homely and the most mysterious aspects of creation, are equally known as works of the Wisdom of God.

From this window the earth with its intricate life is perceived in the light of the Incarnation; God self-disclosed in and with us, as well as God over against us. The depth and mystery of Reality, its stern yet loving action, are revealed within the limitations of history, and in the here-and-now experience of men. . . .

Faith lifts us to the level at which we can see this, and more and more vividly as our eyes grow clearer; shows us the express image of the Eternal Perfect revealed in a human life, of which the various and serial action depends on an unchanging contemplation of God.



Above all in the mysterious power and holiness of sacrifice, the Cross, transfiguring and lifting up the created soul—though in utmost pain, darkness and confusion—to a share in the creative work of God, it finds the one enduring link between the natural and the supernatural life.

Thus, to the eye of Faith the common life of humanity, not any abnormal or unusual experience, is material of God's redeeming action. As ordinary food and water are the stuff of the Christian sacraments, so it is in the ordinary pain and joy, tension and self-oblivion, sin and heroism of normal experience that His moulding and transfiguring work is known. The Palestinian glow which irradiates the homely mysteries of the Gospel, and gives to them the quality of eternal life, lights up for Faith the slums and suburbs, the bustle, games and industries of the modern world. Then the joys, sorrows, choices and renunciations, the poor little efforts and tragedies, of the ground-floor life, are seen to be shot through, dignified and transfigured by the heavenly radiance, the self-oblivious heroism, of the upstairs life. Nor can we exclude from a share in this transforming glory the mystery and pathos of that animal creation from which our natural lives emerge. Faith shows us each tiny creature ringed round by the celestial light. A deep reverence for our common existence, with its struggles and faultiness, yet its solemn implications, comes over us when we realize all this; gratitude for the ceaseless tensions and opportunities through which God comes to us and we can draw a little nearer to Him—a divine economy in which the simplest and weakest are given their part and lot in the holy redemptive sacrifice of humanity, and incorporated in the Mystical Body which incarnates Eternal Life.

—*Concerning the Inner Life*, 111-23

## ON HOPE

Hope, the second of those spiritual powers in man which tend towards God, is a completely confident expectation; that sureness and certitude with which the awakened soul aims at God and rests in God. It is the source of that living peace, that zest and alertness, that power of carrying on, which give its special colour to the genuine

Christian life. Hope brings the exalted vision of Faith into the wear and tear of our daily life. . . .

Hope teaches us the art of wise forgetting; of dropping the superfluous, the outgrown, the trivial. It cleanses the mind from all those half-realities which impede the total concentration of our love and will on God; and lifts up all the rest of our experience into the eternal light, saying: "Even though I do not see the meaning, yet I know all this is conditioning my growth, purifying my spirit, taking me towards You; and nothing matters but that."

Hope finds all life penetrated by a significance that points beyond itself, and has a trustful expectation that the ceaseless stream of events, thoughts, joys, trials—the whole stuff of experience—means something, contributes to something; and only has value because it points beyond itself to God, is an earnest of rich fields of experience awaiting the soul. Such Hope is the bright side of self-abandonment. Much so-called self-abandonment is conceived in the spirit of the 2/-tea; but that real self-abandonment to God which is the supreme expression of our human freedom, should be a delighted act of Hope. "O God, my hope is in Thee," does not mean, "I have tried everything else first." It means that the final achievement of His hidden purpose is what we really care about, and that we entirely depend on Him for the power of achieving our little bit of His plan.

Thus the pain and disappointment, the tragedy and frustration of existence, are transfigured when Hope purifies the mind. If Faith enlarges and illuminates the understanding, shows it the fields of experience that lie beyond its span, Hope integrates Faith's vision with the very texture of our common thoughts, our mental life as a whole; merging the interests of that little life in the vast interests of the Divine love and will. . . .

Such Hope gives the spiritual life its staying power. It is the necessary condition of keeping things going and getting things done. The struggles to which the ground floor of human nature commits us will never be maintained, unless that living spirit presides upstairs. As life goes on, nothing but Hope, its supernatural zest and adventurous temper, will preserve us from the insidious tendency to settle down into making religious pot-boilers; reproducing our old designs, instead of moving on to the things that are before. It is the very soul of the life of prayer; whether that prayer be poured out for the world's betterment, for the many shortcomings of our own premises and performances, or directed beyond all thought of self and world to God its Home: for it is the property of Hope, says St. Thomas, "to make

us tend to God, both as a good to be finally attained, and as a helper strong to assist."

Thus Hope is supremely the virtue of the incomplete; of the creature stretching out in love and prayer to the complete Reality of God, the final object of Hope. . . .

Hope is the source of the gay courage with which the real lover of God faces the apparently impossible or the unknown: and we observe that it is not merely an easy and comfortable optimism. It means acting upon our assurance, taking risks for it; entering upon a path of which we do not see the end. It means "Go forward"; not "Wait and see," or "Safety first." Forgetting the things which are behind, this hope reaches forth with confidence unto the things which are before; stripping off all that impedes it, refusing to be clogged by old fears and prejudices, moribund ideas. It believes in the God of the future, as well as the God of the past.

—*Concerning the Inner Life*, 124-35

## ON LOVE

Charity; the living Spirit of Creative Love. To be a home, a dwelling-place in time for that Spirit, the house has been swept and garnished, the best loved bits of rubbish have been sacrificed, the windows have been cleaned, the table set. It is not intended to be a showplace, but a real "habitation of God through the Spirit"; and the name of the Spirit is Charity. If Faith opened the eyes of the understanding on that threefold vision in which we see that only God is fully real; and if Hope so purified the mind's content that all dropped away but its trustful tendency to that unchanging Reality; then Charity transforms in God the very mainspring of character, the active will, and thus completes the spiritualization of man. . . .

Charity, then, means something which far exceeds altruism. It is the human spirit's share of the Divine life: there is, indeed, no other way in which it can share that life. "Who dwells in charity dwells in God"; is united to God; partakes of the creative point of view. We are looking with awe at the approach made by the human soul to the burning heart of Reality—an approach only made possible by the prevenient action of God—and, turning to our own narrow hearts, our feverish and claimful desires, unreal objectives, and fluctuating

love, we ask: Can these things be? In our own strength, of course, they could not be; but they can be, because the initiative lies with the Divine life. As theology says: "We love Him because He first loved us." Before the stellar universe, before the first mysterious beginnings of creation, the fire of Charity was already lighted. Creation is an act of love; love, as Julian of Norwich was taught in her vision, is its "meaning"—however much that meaning has been overlaid and distorted by the sins and confusions of life. No religious system is worth accepting or imparting that is not in harmony with this mysterious truth: for life, the "more abundant life" of the Eternal World which is offered by God to men, can only be measured in terms of love. . . .

Charity is no easy emotion. It does not merely consist in yielding to the unspeakable attraction of God. We are often terrified and always shamed, when we see what its achievement involved for the Saints; what of their love, joy and peace. The fire of Charity, lit in the soul, needs careful tending. The first tiny flame must not be allowed to die down for lack of fuel; and we may have to feed it with things we should prefer to keep for ourselves. It will only be developed and kept burning in a life informed by prayer—faithful, steady, mortified, self-oblivious prayer, the humble aspiration of the spirit to its Source: indeed, the very object of prayer is to increase and maintain Charity, the loving friendship of the soul with God. . . .

Faith may release the mind from the tyranny of the here-and-now, and Hope may seem to concentrate the whole drive of our being upon the Reality of God. Only Charity can thus weave together both worlds, both levels of the soul's life; and, making our love of God and of His creatures one, provides a habitation, a gathering point for the Creative Love, and opens a channel through which it can be applied to each detail of His unfinished world. Thus it is, as the mystics says, that Charity makes God and the soul "one thing."

—*Concerning the Inner Life*, 138-45

## THE CHARACTERS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

The first point I wish to make is, that the experience which we call the life of the Spirit is such a genuine fact; which meets us at all times and places, and at all levels of life. It is an experience which is

independent of, and often precedes, any explanation or rationalization we may choose to make of it: and no one, as a matter of fact, takes any real interest in the explanation, unless he has had some form of the experience. We notice, too, that it is most ordinarily and also most impressively given to us as such an objective experience, whole and unanalysed; and that when it is thus given, and perceived as effecting a transfiguration of human character, we on our part most readily understand and respond to it. . . .

We begin therefore at the starting-point of this life of Spirit: in man's vague, fluctuating, yet persistent apprehension of an enduring and transcendent Reality—his instinct for God. The characteristic forms taken by this instinct are simple and fairly well known. Complication only comes in with the interpretation we put on them.

By three main ways we tend to realize our limited personal relations with that transcendent Other which we call divine, eternal or real; and these, appearing perpetually in the vast literature of religion, might be illustrated from all places and all times.

First, there is the profound sense of security; of being safely held in a cosmos of which, despite all contrary appearance, peace is the very heart, and which is not inimical to our true interests. For those whose religious experience takes this form, God is the Ground of the soul, the Unmoved, our Very Rest; statements which meet us again and again in spiritual literature. This certitude of a principle of permanence within and beyond our world of change—the sense of Eternal Life—lies at the very centre of the religious consciousness; which will never on this point capitulate to the attacks of philosophy on the one hand (such as those of the New Realists) or of psychology on the other hand, assuring him that what he mistakes for the Eternal World is really his own unconscious mind. Here man, at least in his great representatives—the persons of transcendent religious genius—seems to get beyond all labels. He finds and feels a truth that cannot fail him, and that satisfies both his heart and his mind: a justification of that transcendental feeling which is the soul alike of philosophy and of art. If his life has its roots here, it will be a fruitful tree; and whatever its outward activities, it will be a spiritual life, since it is lived, as George Fox was so fond of saying, in the Universal Spirit. . . . But in the second characteristic form of the religious experience, the relationship is felt rather as the intimate and reciprocal communion of a person with a Person; a form of apprehension which is common to the great majority of devout natures. It is true that Divine Reality, while doubtless including in its span all the values

we associate with personality, must far overpass it: and this conclusion has been reached again and again by profoundly religious minds, of whom among Christians we need only mention Dionysius the Areopagite, Eckhart and Ruysbroeck. Yet these very minds have always in the end discovered the necessity of finding place for the overwhelming certitude of a personal contact, a prevenient and an answering love. For it is always in a personal and emotional relationship that man finds himself impelled to surrender to God; and this surrender is felt by him to evoke a response. It is significant that even modern liberalism is forced, in the teeth of rationality, to acknowledge this fact of the religious experience. . . .

Christianity, through its concepts of the Divine Fatherhood and of the Eternal Christ, has given to this sense of personal communion its fullest and most beautiful expression:

Love, whoso loves thee cannot idle be, so sweet it seems to him to taste thee; but every hour he lives in longing, that he may love thee more straitly. For in thee the heart so joyful dwells, that he who feels it not can never say how sweet it is to taste thy savour.

On the immense question of *what* it is that lies behind this sense of direct intercourse, this passionate friendship with the Invisible, I cannot enter. But it has been one of the strongest and most fruitful influences in religious history, and gives in particular its special colour to the most perfect developments of Christian mysticism.

Last—and here is the aspect of religious experience which is specially to concern us—Spirit is felt as an inflowing power, a veritable accession of vitality; energizing the self, or the religious group, impelling it to the fullest and most zealous living-out of its existence, giving it fresh joy and vigour, and lifting it to fresh levels of life. This sense of enhanced life is a mark of all religions of the Spirit. "He giveth power to the faint," says the Second Isaiah, "and to them that hath no might he increaseth strength . . . they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." "I live—yet not I," "I can do all things," says St. Paul, seeking to express his dependence on this Divine strength invading and controlling him: and assures his neophytes that they too have received "the Spirit of power." "My life," says St. Augustine, "shall be a real life, being wholly full of Thee." "Having found God," says a modern Indian saint, "the current of my life flowed on swiftly, I gained fresh strength." All other men and women of the Spirit speak in the same

sense, when they try to describe the source of their activity and endurance.

So, the rich experiences of the religious consciousness seem to be resumed in these three outstanding types of spiritual awareness. The cosmic, ontological, or transcendent; finding God as the infinite Reality outside and beyond us. The personal, finding Him as the living and responsive object of our love, in immediate touch with us. The dynamic, finding Him as the power that dwells within or energizes us. These are not exclusive but complementary apprehensions, giving objectives to intellect, feeling and will. They must all be taken into account in any attempt to estimate the full character of the spiritual life, and this life can hardly achieve perfection unless all three be present in some measure.

—*The Life of the Spirit and the Life of To-day*, 1-11

## THE EDUCATION OF THE SPIRIT

There is a common idea that the spiritual life means something pious and mawkish: not very desirable in girls, and most objectionable in boys. It is strange that this notion, which both the Jewish and Christian Scriptures so emphatically contradict, should ever have grown up amongst us. The spirit, says St. Paul, is not a spirit of fearfulness; it is "a spirit of Power and Love and Discipline"—qualities that make for vigour and manliness of the best type. It is the very source of our energies, both natural and supernatural. The mystics sometimes called it our "life-giving life," and modern psychologists are beginning to discover that it is, in the most literal sense, our "health's eternal spring." People say, "Come, Holy Spirit"; as if it were something foreign to us: yet it comes perpetually in every baby born into the world, for each new human life entering the temporal order implies a new influx or, least, a new manifestation of spirit. But, when spirit is thus wedded to mind and body to form human nature, it is submitted to the law governing human nature: the law of freedom. It is ours, to develop or stunt as we please. Its mighty powers are not pressed on an unwilling race, but given us in germ to deal with as we will. Parents are responsible for giving it every opportunity of development, the food, the light, the nurture that all growing things require—in fact, for its education: a great honour, and a great responsibility.



If we are asked wherein such education should consist, I think we must reply that its demands are not satisfied by teaching the child any series of religious doctrines divorced from practical experience. He is full of energies demanding expression. Our object is so to train those energies that they shall attain their full power and right balance; and enable him to set up relations with the spiritual world in which he truly lives. The first phase in this education will consist in a definite moral training, which is like the tilling and preparation of the earth in which the spiritual plant is to grow. . . . What does that imply? It implies the cultivation of self-control, order, and disinterestedness. Order is a quality which all spiritual writers hold in great esteem; for they are far from being the ecstatic, unbalanced, and mood-ridden creatures of popular fancy. Now the untrained child has all the disorderly ways, the uncontrolled and self-interested instincts of the primitive man. He is a vigorous young animal, reacting promptly and completely to the stimulus of fear or of greed. The history of human society, the gradual exchange of license for law, self-interest for group-interest, spasmodic activity for orderly diligence must be repeated in him if he is to take his place in that human society. But if we would also prepare in him the way of spirit, the aim of this training must be something higher than that convenient social morality, that spirit of fair play, truth, justice, mutual tolerance, which public school discipline seeks to develop. That morality is relative and utilitarian. The morality in which alone the life of the spirit can flourish is absolute and ideal. It is sought, not because it makes life secure, or promotes the greatest happiness of the greatest number, but for its own sake. Yet in spite of this, the social order, in the form in which the child comes in contact with it, may be made one of the best instruments for producing those characters demanded by the spiritual life. For what, after all, is the exchanging of self-interest for group-interests but the beginning of love? And what is at the root of the spirit of give and take but humility? . . .

How, then, should we begin this most delicate of all tasks; this education of the most sacred and subtle aspect of human nature? We must be careful; for difficulties and dangers crowd the path, cranks lie in wait at every corner. I have spoken of the moral preparation. That is always safe and sure. But there are two other safe ways of approach; the devotional and aesthetic. These two ways are not alternative, but complementary. Art, says Hegel, belongs to the highest sphere of spirit, and is to be placed in respect of its content on the same footing as religion and philosophy; and many others—seers and

philosophers—have found in the revelation of beauty an authentic witness to God. But the love and realization of beauty, without reverence and devotion, soon degenerates into mere pleasure. So, too, devotion, unless informed with the spirit of beauty, becomes thin, hard and sterile. But where these two exist together, we find on one hand that the developed apprehension which discovers deep messages in nature, in music, in all the noble rhythms of art, makes the senses themselves into channels of Spirit: and this is an apprehension which we can foster and control. And on the other hand the devotional life, rightly understood as a vivid, joyful thing—with that disciplining of the attention and will which is such an important part of it—is the most direct way to an attainment of that simple and natural consciousness of our intangible spiritual environment which all ought to possess, and which the old mystics called by the beautiful name of the “practice of the Presence of God.”

This linking up of the devotional life with the instinct for beauty and wonder, will check its concentration on the more sentimental and anthropomorphic aspects of religion; and so discourage that religious emotionalism which wise educationalists rightly condemn. Hence these two ways of approach, merged as they should be into one, can bring the self into that simple kind of contemplation which is a normal birthright of every soul, but of which our defective education deprives so many men and women; who cannot in later life quicken those faculties which have been left undeveloped in youth. As logic is a supreme exercise of the mind, so contemplation is a supreme exercise of the spirit: it represents the full activity of that intuitional faculty which is our medium of contact with absolute truth. Before the inevitable smile appears on the face of the reader, I say at once that I am not suggesting that we should teach young children contemplation; though I am sure that many brought up in a favouring atmosphere naturally practise it long before they know the meaning of the word. But I do suggest that we should bring them up in such a way that their developed spirits might in the end acquire this art, without any more sense of break with the normal than that which is felt by the developed mind when it acquires the art of logic.

What is contemplation? It is attention to the things of the spirit: surely no outlandish or alarming practice, foreign to the general drift of human life. Were we true to our own beliefs, it should rather be our central and supremely natural activity; the way in which we turn to the spiritual world, and pick up the messages it sends to us. That world is always sending us messages of liberation, of hope, and

of peace. Are we going to deprive our children of this unmeasured heritage, this extension of life—perhaps the greatest of the rights of man—or leave their enjoyment of it to some happy chance? We cannot read the wonderful records of the spiritually awakened without a sense of the duty that is laid on us, to develop if we can this spiritual consciousness in the generation that is to be.

—*The Essentials of Mysticism*, 89-92; 95-98

## THE SOUL IN ACTION

For the aim of the soul's self-giving to Spirit, and Spirit's possession of soul, is that the soul may expand, become more deeply living and creative, and be woven into that spiritual body, the Invisible Church, through which the work of the Spirit is done. The great liturgic action of the Church Visible, its ceaseless corporate life of intercession, self-offering, adoration, only has meaning as the outward expression of this mystery of "the Spirit and the Bride." And on the other hand, the personal life of prayer only has its meaning, because it is part of that great life-process, of which the limits are unknown to us, and which is bringing in the Kingdom of God. And hence, its full exercise is only possible where the Divine Charity purifies and possesses the soul. As adoration led on and in, to a personal relationship of communion and self-offering; so, from that entire self-offering—and not otherwise—there develops the full massive and active prayer in which the human spirit becomes in a mysterious way the fellow-worker with the Holy Spirit of Creation; a channel or instrument through which that Spirit's work is done, and His power flows out to other souls and things. The dynamic Love of God, moving secretly and quietly within the web of circumstance, finds in the man of prayer the most subtle and powerful of its tools.

"Thou hast made us for Thyself": not only to be worshippers, but to be workmen. The will transformed in charity, and united with that power of God which indwells our finite spirits, can and does reach out by supplication, by immolation, by suffering, or by a steady and a patient love; to rescue, heal, change, give support and light. In and through it is manifested some small ray of the saving and redeeming power of God. . . .

For all real prayer is part of the Divine action. It is, as St. Paul

says, Spirit that prays in us; and through and in this prayer exerts a transforming influence upon the created world of souls and things. . . .

For the prayer of a wide-open and surrendered human spirit appears to be a major channel for the free action of that Spirit of God with whom this soul is "united in her ground." Thus it seems certain that the energy of prayer can and does avail for the actual modifying of circumstance; the renewing of physical health; the refraining from sin; and that its currents form an important constituent of that invisible web which moulds and conditions human life. It may open a channel along which power, healing or enlightenment go to those who need them; as the watering-can provides the channel along which water goes to the thirsty plant. Or the object achieved may be, as we say, "directly spiritual"; the gradual purifying and strengthening, and final sublimation of the praying soul, or of some other particular soul. In all such cases, though much remains mysterious, the connexion between prayer and result does appear as the connexion of genuine cause and effect. Living as we do on the fringe of the great world of Spirit, we lay hold on its mysterious energies and use them in our prayer. We are plainly in the presence of that which Elisabeth Lesueur called "a high and fruitful form of action, the more secure that it is secret," and only limited by the power and purity of our faith and love.

There is, on the other hand, an intercessory prayer which seems to have no specified aim. It is poured out, an offering of love, in order that it may be used; and this is specially true of its more developed forms in the interior life of devoted souls. As spiritual writers say, its energies and sufferings may simply be "given to God," added to the total sacrificial action of the Church. It may then do a work which remains for ever unknown to the praying soul: contributing to the good of the whole universe of spirits, the conquest of evil, the promotion of the Kingdom, the increased energy of holiness. Such general and sacrificial prayer has always formed part of the interior life of the saints; and is an enduring strand in the corporate work of the Church. It may be done by way of a secret immolation of the heart, by a routine of ordered petitions, or by the solemn ritual of vicarious suffering. It may capture and consecrate all the homely activities of daily life, and endue them with sacramental power. . . .

Here we are surely face to face with one of the great mysteries of that spiritual world in which our real lives are lived; one of the ways in which, as Newman said, we can already "share the life of saints and angels"—those ordained distributors of the love and power of God.

We cannot understand it, but perhaps we grasp its reality better if we keep in mind two facts. The first is, that all experience proves that we are not separate, ring-fenced spirits. We penetrate each other, influence each other for good and evil, for the giving or taking of vitality, all the time. . . . And this interaction of souls, this mysterious but most actual communion, depends for its life and reality on God, Spirit, the immanent creative life, Who penetrates and indwells us all, working in and with us. We are all linked in Him. Therefore it is literally true that the secret pressure of the Eternal is present in all movements of mutual service and love.

And the second fact is, that the value and reality of our souls is at least as much social as individual. We do, and must, reinforce each other; make good each other's weakness. Each saint has something to give which adds to the glow of all saints: and only by self-loss in that one radiance can make his own life complete. We are woven together, the bright threads and the dull, to form a living tissue susceptible of God, informed by His infinite, self-spending love. . . .

Thus, intercession is the activity of a spirit which is a member of this living society, this fabric of praying souls penetrated and irradiated by God-Spirit. For this membership gives to each unit a special quality, vigour, power; a power only given in order that it may be used and shared. Its essence is not the activity of the little soul over against Spirit, but the action of Spirit through and in the little soul self-given to the Spirit's Will. Here we reach the real dignity of the creature, and the very object of the life of prayer: it is able to convey God because it has become susceptible of God. . . .

Hence all effective intercession depends on the one hand on the keeping alive of the soul's susceptibility to God, its religious sensitiveness, by constant self-openings toward Him and movements of humble and adoring love; and on the other hand, on keeping keenly alert to the needs of the world, through an untiring and informed pity and sympathy, "a wide spreading love to all in common." Only a charity poured out in both directions can become and remain a channel of the Spirit's Will. And such a vocation in its fullness means much suffering; a bearing of griefs and a carrying of sorrows, an agonized awareness of sadness and sin. For the great intercessor must possess an extreme sensitiveness to the state and needs of souls and of the world.

—*The Golden Sequence*, 178-90

## THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF A TEACHER

Well, at first sight, it seems, doesn't it, as though the inner life of the teacher, her relation with God, must be much the same as that of any other Christian? That is to say, its three great marks must be, first, a steady and humble worship of God in Himself, His beauty and and His perfection; next, a ceaseless, loving self-giving to Him; and last, the effort to serve and co-operate with Him. But if we consider it a little more deeply, we realize that there is something peculiar to the position of a teacher, which requires a special quality in the interior and spiritual life that supports it.

You, a Child of God, are specially called upon to help and train the younger children of God to understand and deal with the rich and many-levelled life in which He has placed them: to educate them in the fullest, most profoundly Christian sense of that ill-used word. So, a right attitude to Him, the satisfying of your inner need of Him, matters in your case supremely; not merely on account of yourselves and your own souls, but—which is much more important—on account of those who have been put in your charge, the little growing spirits for whom you are responsible to God. If that inner life goes wrong, your work goes wrong. You, so small and weak, are to show them their way about, in a life that only has meaning because it is created and loved and guided by God. How can you hope to do that, unless your own sense of His reality is very strong and humble and realistic—full of awe and full of joy? Your secret life of prayer, and your share in the great life of the Church, must nourish this: keep you in His atmosphere, and so give you peace within your work and power to do it. A deep, wide and steady devotional life, pursued up hill and down dale; in darkness and in light, whether you feel like it or whether you don't, is therefore the essential foundation of your teaching work. In neglecting to gain this, and keep it, you are neglecting the most important aspect of that work—failing God. This is obvious, isn't it?

The first, just because that dangerous word Teacher is used to you and about you, your whole inner life must be ruled and sweetened by a ceaseless teachableness; a sense of subordination to God, in all things both little and great. For you are simply one particular dispenser of a little trickle of His Infinite Light and Love. Whether you are actually teaching religion or not, your work is always religious; because it is concerned with explaining God's Universe, its laws and action and beauty, and all the behaviour and discoveries of His creatures, and the right use of the bodies and minds He has made. If you

follow out the meaning of what you are doing, you will find it all leads back to Him: for He is the one Reality, the Fountain of all life. And so, once again, keeping your own attitude to Him healthy, alert, humble, is a first charge on your time. We often speak of the teacher's vocation: but a vocation does not mean that we do the calling and choosing, it means that God calls and chooses. And that call should be the beginning of a lifelong correspondence with Him: often of course entailing quite a lot of trouble and effort on our part, as all great things do, but the essential condition of your work. For in that work, if it is worth anything, you continually give yourself: and you must receive and go on receiving, if you are to give and go on giving. Your whole life hangs on a great Given-ness. And so the more your life is ruled by a humble and docile dependence on God the more, that is to say, it becomes in its totality a Prayer, the more useful you will be to Him and to those who are placed in your care. You will then be an actual link between His Creative Love and the children you teach. No lesser ideal than that is worth while for you, as Christians, is it? And that means that your whole lives must be coloured by your loving attention to God. For He has chosen you for a job which, properly done, would bit by bit transform and save the world. The soul of every child, says Péguy, represents a hope of God. He has committed to you some of His hope. What a privilege, isn't it? What a meaning it must give to your life; and how obvious it is that this tremendous vocation must govern your whole life of prayer! And this is what I want to talk about this afternoon. . . .

The spiritual life of the Christian Church is not a series of duets: it is a great symphony, in which every soul has a part, and no soul is independent of the rest. My prayer is to be the prayer of a living member of that Church; a ceaseless self-giving to God for His purpose, and ceaseless accepting from Him of all I need to carry out that purpose. The altar, the place of oblation, where I give myself without limit to God as a reasonable and living sacrifice, and thereby receive from Him new life; the whole drive of my devotional life should be towards that.

This means learning and practising ever more faithfully and completely those three movements which make up the full life of our souls: (1) an adoring, unconditional and absolutely trustful self-giving to God; (2) a drawing near, to have communion with Him in meditation and silence, when our own action ceases, and His action renews and feeds us; and (3) last and best, that co-operation in which we become His actual tools and channels, because there is an open path



between His generous Spirit and our small dependent spirits. So these are the three movements which are to go with you in your worship and secret prayers and work, however exacting, practical and apparently unspiritual that work may seem to be: or hardest of all, when your lives seem to be filled with an unprofitable routine. . . .

Take me and use me, as a tool. I have taken my place in God's workshop as a bit of His creative apparatus. So I must keep myself at His disposal, and respond with humble love, as He teaches me from within and shows me His will. "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto Wisdom": that is what we ought to ask, and go on asking. That we may stand by Thee, the Divine Wisdom, and know and love and help Thy creation—or whatever bit of Thy creation is given us to care for and love and work at—with that selfless knowledge, and that disinterested love, free from all claimfulness, which does not conflict with Thy holy knowledge and love.

—*Collected Papers*, 200-211

## PRAYER IN A TEACHER'S LIFE

Do you remember how, in Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Gabriel Oak, that perfect shepherd, used to stand upon a hill at night and gaze into the starry sky, until he could feel this little world rolling through the immensity of space? That great vision made him a better shepherd, not a worse one. When Bathsheba's sheep overate themselves and got indigestion, he was the person who was sent for and knew exactly what to do. And so too it is with the teacher. If you once allowed yourself to think that your immediate job was everything, and nothing lay beyond to give it meaning, you might soon give up in disgust, when petty worries and failures overwhelmed you. But if beyond that little bit of life you can glimpse the steadfast reality of God, and feel that same living and infinite reality penetrating and moulding all souls and working through you, then you gain new heart for going on. It is towards an ever greater sense of that Eternal Reality that you want to help your pupils' souls to grow. . . .

What is feeding? It is bringing to a living, growing and organic

creature something from outside itself; which it can take in and digest and turn into part of its own substance, and so grow and maintain its energy. Feeding means gathering material, and so preparing it that it suits the appetite, digestion and needs of each of those in your care. It will mean keeping in personal touch with all that is best and most living in religion; so that you may have plenty of fresh nourishing food to give, and not have to fall back on tinned stuff. It means that what you give in words, acts, suggestion or influence is of infinite importance, and no trouble is too much to get it right. That may involve giving up many of your private prejudices; always thinking of your pupils, rather than of your own point of view. It means an elastic hold upon everything except essentials; and also a very clear idea of those essentials on which you must never lose your grasp.

The next point is that your classes do not consist of little angels, by any manner of means. They consist of human beings; who are bodies *and* spirits, whose physical being is the result of organic evolution, and who have got to live in a world which is material and spiritual both at once. . . . Certainly it often seems as though the body pulls one way and the soul another way. The animal and the spiritual creature have conflicting interests and desires. But it is your business to try to resolve that conflict; to help those in your charge, as we say, to sublimate the great animal instincts and desires. No believer in an incarnational religion, who is called upon to deal with souls, can afford for one minute to disregard the bodily life with all its opportunities and dangers. You are dealing with creatures immersed in organic life, who take colour from their surroundings and express themselves in physical no less than mental ways. Creatures whose psychic life is so intricately entwined with their bodily life, that even character itself is deeply affected by the body's chemical state and the activities of its glands. That is the material handed out to you, which you must help to grow up towards God; and that too is the sort of creatures you are yourselves. Look those facts squarely in the face, and be ready for their often disconcerting results. . . .

If we study the lives of great religious teachers—and that is a very fruitful sort of study for you—one thing we can hardly fail to learn from them is how gentle, gradual and patient is the way in which they do this work. The nearer those who teach religion are to God, the more they seem to share His long patience and compassionate, cherishing, unexact attitude to men; and where the Holy Spirit takes and uses any individual for the work of teaching souls, He will always bring their method nearer and nearer to this gentleness. I

don't pretend this sort of way of tackling your work will be easy. It requires indeed a perpetual death to self. Everyone here must have experience of the fact that teaching children and adolescents can be an intensely tiresome job. But perhaps it helps us if we remember that it is God Himself who comes to us, in and with even the most tiresome young creatures. That which His Spirit has given to them is in need of something which that same Spirit has given to us. Buried in each of those souls—sometimes not easy to discover—is a particular tendency; which, properly fostered, is going to make them useful to God. You have got to find that tendency; help, support and feed it. What a responsibility, and what an honour!

—*Collected Papers*, 188-96

## IDEALS FOR WOMEN IN THE MINISTRY

I am opposed to the giving of the priesthood to women; for many reasons, and chiefly because I feel that so complete a break with Catholic tradition cannot be made save by the consent of a united Christendom. Any local or national Church which makes it will drop at once to the level of an eccentric sect. On the other hand, I greatly desire and also expect an immense extension and recognition of women's ministry in other directions than this. Properly "rooted and grounded" in lives of real simplicity and self-abandonment, this must conduce to the well-being and enriching of the Church's life. . . .

What, after all, is Christian ministry, male or female, lay or ecclesiastical? It is, or should be, just the attempt of some one who cares supremely about God to cherish and help in one way or another the souls that are loved by God: to be as one that serveth. And moreover it is an attempt that is made, not because we feel like it or choose it, but because we are decisively pressed, called, put to it. "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." The word vocation does not mean that we do the calling. It is true, alas, that we often seem to see this principle ignored; but is it worth while to consider the sort and degree of pastoral work which we *might* do, unless we are prepared to do everything which comes our way from that centre? . . .

That real teaching saint, Father Benson of Cowley, said: "It is a sign of perfection to be willing to do anything"; yes, even under the orders of the curate you don't much like. Supple, equal to any burden

and any job, because the burden of one's own importance has been given up. Surely a body of women aiming at that type of perfection would do more for God than a body of women who had achieved some particular status. The work that endures, and that is worth while, comes always from an immense self-surrender; and only that kind of ministry is going to increase the power and vitality of the Church. . . . If it is true—and I think perhaps it is true—that the movement of that Spirit within the Church is opening fresh paths along which women can serve God and souls; then how careful we must all be, to balance our initiative and devotedness by great patience, suppleness, and self-oblivion. We surely cannot wish to give up the sacred privilege of the lowest place. . . .

I have known a few women in my life who have genuinely ministered to souls in a creative way: who truly gave the living water and the heavenly food. They have all been extremely simple and unpretentious. The question of status, scope and so forth has never, I should think, entered their minds at all. Their hidden life of love and prayer—and here surely is a capital point—has largely exceeded and entirely supported their life of active work. That, it seems to me, is the ministry which the Church so desperately wants; and if we are ever to give it, it means that our inner life towards God must be twice—no, ten, a hundred times—more vivid, constant and courageous than anything our active life may demand of us. For only thus can we ever begin to learn charity; and it is only in charity that men and women can minister to each other spiritual things. . . .

So, if there is to be a new movement in the Church, a removal of barriers and a new opportunity of pastoral service for women, how terribly careful we should be that it begins in a movement of the heart; and that this movement should be, as von Hügel says, vertical first and horizontal afterwards. Don't you think that what the Church needs most, is not more and more officials but more and more people freely self-given for love? people who work from the centre, and radiate God because they possess Him; people in whom, as St. Teresa said, Martha and Mary combine. No use getting Martha that splendid up-to-date gas cooker if you have to shove Mary out of the way to find a place where it can stand. . . .

Surely we want women to retain something of that precious suppleness, simplicity and freedom which makes us tools fit for many purposes. It is so much better just to be able to say "Send me" without having to add "where I shall have my position properly recognized, or opportunities to use my special gifts." It is God whom we want to get

recognized; not us. If we look again at the women saints, we see that with them that is usually so. They often had immense difficulties, emerging as most of them did within a Church far more rigidly organized than ours. They often suffered from the jealousy, misunderstanding and suspicion of their contemporaries. But they did feed some sheep; and that is what matters after all. Look at St. Catherine in her little room at Siena, surrounded by her spiritual sons; or Madame Acarie fulfilling her vocation in and through her family life, and becoming the "Conscience of Paris." Consider those great lives, burning with charity; let us measure our thoughts about the ministry of women by them. . . .

So I think that efforts to defend and expand the ministry of women in the Church will be useless for the deeper purposes of the Spirit, unless there is a ceaseless recognition that usefulness in religion means usefulness to God; and usefulness to God depends upon ceaseless co-operation with Him. And this again requires a sensitiveness to the movement of the Spirit impossible without a steady and disciplined interior life of prayer. . . . If this temper of soul, this profound humility is sought by us, then I should feel the future as regards the ministry of women was absolutely safe. Without it, we should perhaps be wise to ponder the advice which the saintly Abbé Huvelin gave to a distinguished lady of our own communion who consulted him about her numerous religious activities: "Madame, distrust your own zeal for doing good to others."

—*Mixed Pastures*, 113-22

## PRAYER IN THE LIFE OF A PRIEST

How then are *you*, in your special circumstances, going to weave together prayer and outward action into the single perfect fabric of the apostolic life? I just mention three among the many ways in which it seems to me that the clergy can do this: making their inner life of prayer continuously and directly useful to those to whom they are sent, incorporating it with their pastoral activities.

I put first a very simple thing; a thing which I imagine that almost everyone can do, and which I have never known to fail in its effect. It is this. Make time to pray in your own churches as much as you possibly can. That is the first move towards making these churches real houses, schools and homes of prayer, which very often they are

not. I do not mean by this merely saying Matins and Evensong in them. I mean, let at least part of the time which is given to your real and informal communion with God be spent in your own church. That is the best and most certain way in which to give our churches the atmosphere of devotion which we all recognize so quickly when we find it, and which turns them into spiritual homes; and I believe it is one of the most valuable forms of Christian witness which can be exercised by the clergy in the present day.

It seems to me that it is very little use to keep a church open, unless its own priest does care to go into it and pray in it. You might just as well, in most cases, keep a waiting room open. . . . This creation of a real supernatural home, and steady practice of a real supernatural hospitality, is the first point, it seems to me, in which a clergyman can hardly fail to make his inner life directly serve his flock.

The next direction in which it is possible for you to make your self-training in prayer useful to those in your charge falls under the general head of intercession. That will of course include all that you can do for your parish and for individuals in the way of support, in the way of tranquillizing and healing influences, in the way of supernatural guidance, by the loving meditations and prayers which you spend upon them. Those who deal much with souls soon came to know something about the strange spiritual currents which are at work under the surface of life, and the extent in which charity can work on supernatural levels for supernatural ends. But if you are to do that, the one thing that matters is that you should care supremely about it; care, in fact, so much that you do not mind how much you suffer for it. We cannot help anyone until we do care, for it is only by love that spirit penetrates spirit.

Consider for a moment what is implied in this amazing mystery of intercession; at least in the little that we understand of it. It implies first our implicit realization of God, the infinitely loving, living and all-penetrating Spirit of Spirits, as an Ocean in which we all are bathed. And next, speaking still that spatial language to which our human thinking is tied down, that somehow through this uniting and vivifying medium we too, being one with Him in love and will, can mutually penetrate, move and influence each other's souls in ways as yet unguessed; yet throughout the whole process moulded and determined by the prevenient, personal, free and ever-present God. The world He has been and is creating is a world infused through and through with Spirit; and it is partly through the prayerful and God-inspired action of men that the spiritual work of this world is done.

When a man or woman of prayer, through their devoted concentration, reaches a soul in temptation and rescues it, we must surely acknowledge that this is the action of God Himself, using that person as an instrument.

In this mysterious interaction of energies it seems that one tool is put into our hands: our love, will, interest, desire—four words describing four aspects of one thing. This dynamic love, once purged of self-interest, is ours to use on spiritual levels; it is an engine for working with God on other souls. The saints so used it, often at tremendous cost to themselves, and with tremendous effect. As their personality grew in strength and expanded in adoration, so they were drawn on to desperate and heroic wrestling for souls; to those exhausting and creative activities, that steady and generous giving of support, that redeeming prayer by which human spirits are called to work with God. . . .

The third obvious way in which the priest's life of prayer reacts upon his flock, is in the personal advice and guidance which he is able to give to those who consult him—to use a technical word, in direction work. What is direction? It is the guidance of one soul by and through another soul. It is the individual and intensive side of pastoral work. God comes to and affects individuals very largely through other individuals; and you, in your ordination, all offered yourselves for this. The relation of discipleship is one that obtains right through and down all stages of the spiritual life; giving to it a definite social structure, protecting it from subjectivism and lawlessness and ensuring its continuity. Hence all that we may have been given or gained we ought ever to be ready to impart. . . .

Amongst those who are likely to come to a clergyman for spiritual advice are three outstanding classes. First, quite young people, including Confirmation candidates, who are at the beginning of their spiritual, mental and emotional lives, and wish for guidance in religion. Secondly, adults who have lost their faith, or have never had it, but who now want to be helped to find God. Thirdly, adults who are still Christian, but who are tortured by doubts, or over-tired by life; and who want to be helped not to lose God. Here the first principle surely is that in each class each person must be envisaged separately; and in each case the directing soul must think first not of its own point of view, not of any set doctrinal scheme, any "Catholic" or "Evangelical" principles, but of that one inquiring soul in its special needs, its special stage of advancement, its special relation to God.

—*Concerning the Inner Life*, 47-54

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES for the DEVOTIONAL  
LIFE

***PART THREE***



## DISCIPLINES FOR THE RELIGIOUS WORKER

The very first requisite for a minister of religion is that his own inner life should be maintained in a healthy state; his own contact with God be steady and true. But just because you are ministers of religion, and therefore committed to perpetual external activities, this fostering and feeding of the inner life is often in some ways far more difficult for you, than it is for those for whom you work and whom you teach. The time which you have at your disposal for the purpose is limited; and the rest of your time is more or less fully occupied with external religious and philanthropic activities, often of a most exacting kind. There is a constant drain on your spiritual resources, which you simply must make good: while the relief and change so necessary for all of us if our spiritual lives are to remain keen, vivid, real, is often lacking in your case, going incessantly as you do and must from one form of religious activity to another.

This being so, it does become immensely important, doesn't it? for you to have a clear view of your own spiritual position and needs, a clear idea of the essentials of your situation; and to plot out the time which you have at your own disposal as well as you possibly can. The clergyman above all other men needs to learn, and raise to the level of habit, George Fox's art of "seeing all things in the Universal Light." Yet it very often happens that the busy and driven parish priest entirely loses sight not merely of his own spiritual position, but also of this great spiritual landscape in which he is placed; by concentrating all the while on those details of it that specially concern him. He cannot see the forest, because he is attending so faithfully to the trees. It is surely a first charge on his devotional life, to recover that sense of the forest, which gives all their meaning to the trees.

For this purpose, it seems to me, neither a hard and fast liturgic scheme, nor the most carefully planned theological reading, nor any sort of dreamy devotionalism, is going to be of use to you. The primary thing, I believe, that will be of use is a conception, as clear and rich and deep as you are able to get it, first of the Splendour of God; and next of your own souls over against that Splendour of God; and last of the sort of interior life which your election of His service demands. God—the soul—its election of Him—the three fundamental realities of religion. If these realities do not rule the mind and heart

of the priest, how is it conceivable that he can do the work of God in the souls of other men? . . .

Now there is only one way in which it is possible for the religious teacher to do all this; and that is by enriching his sense of God. And that enrichment of the sense of God is surely the crying need of our current Christianity. A shallow religiousness, the tendency to be content with a bright ethical piety wrongly called practical Christianity, a nice, brightly-varnished this-world faith, seems to me to be one of the ruling defects of institutional religion at the present time. . . . I do not think we can deny that there is at present a definite trend in the direction of religion of this shallow social type; and it will only be checked if and in so far as the clergy are themselves real men of prayer, learning to know at first hand more and more deeply—and so more and more humbly—the ineffable realities to which they have given their lives. Therefore to become and to continue a real man of prayer, seems to me the first duty of a parish priest.

What then is a real man of prayer? He is one who deliberately wills and steadily desires that his intercourse with God and other souls shall be controlled and actuated at every point by God Himself; one who has so far developed and educated his spiritual sense, that his supernatural environment is more real and solid to him than his natural environment. A man of prayer is not necessarily a person who says a number of offices, or abounds in detailed intercessions; but he is a child of God, who is and knows himself to be in the depths of his soul attached to God, and is wholly and entirely guided by the Creative Spirit in his prayer and his work. This is not merely a bit of pious language. It is a description, as real and concrete as I can make it, of the only really apostolic life. . . .

Consider. As Christians we are committed, are we not? to a belief in the priority of the supernatural world; the actual presence, and working within visible appearance, of the Creative Spirit of God. For the parishes to which you are sent you are, or should be, the main links with that supernatural world; the main channels of God's action on souls. You are those in whom the hope of a more intense spiritual life for those parishes is centered: those in whom for this purpose God has placed His trust. . . .

There you are, moving through life: immersed in the world of succession and change, constantly claimed by the little serial duties and interests of your career, and yet ringed round by the solemn horizon of eternity, informed by its invisible powers. And—because you are

priests—even more than is the case with other men, all that you do, feel and think as you move through this changing life, is going to affect all the other souls whom you touch, and condition their relation with that unchanging Real. Through you, they may be attracted to or repelled by the spiritual life. You are held tight in that double relationship; to those changing other souls, and to that changeless God. What you are like, and what your relation to God is like; this must and will affect all those whom you visit, preach to, pray with, and to whom you give the sacraments. It will make the difference between Church services which are spiritual experiences to those attending them, and Church services which consist in the formal recitation of familiar words. . . . How are you going to show these souls, who need it so dreadfully, the joy and delightfulness of God and surrender to God, unless you have it yourself? But that means giving time, patience, effort to such a special discipline and cultivation of your attention as artists must give, if they are to enter deeply into the reality and joy of natural loveliness and impart it in their work. Do you see the great facts and splendours of religion with the eye of an artist and a lover, or with the eye of a man of business, or the eye of the man in the street? Is your sense of wonder and mystery keen and deep? Such a sense of wonder and mystery, such a living delight in God, is of course in technical language a grace. It is something added, given, to the natural man. But, like all other graces, its reception by us depends very largely on the exercise of our will and our desire, on our mental and emotional openness and plasticity. It will not be forced upon us. And we show our will and desire, keep ourselves plastic, in and through the character of our prayer. You remember Jeremy Taylor's saying: "Prayer is only the body of the bird—desires are its wings." . . .

The saintly and simple Curé d'Ars was once asked the secret of his abnormal success in converting souls. He replied that it was done by being very indulgent to others and very hard on himself; a recipe which retains all its virtue still. And this power of being outwardly genial and inwardly austere, which is the real Christian temper, depends entirely on the use we make of the time set apart for personal religion. It is always achieved if courageously and faithfully sought; and there are no heights of love and holiness to which it cannot lead, no limits to the power which it can exercise over the souls of men. . . .

If we ask of the saints how they achieved spiritual effectiveness, they are only able to reply that, in so far as they did it themselves, they did it by love and prayer. A love that is very humble and homely;

a prayer that is full of adoration and of confidence. Love and prayer, on their lips, are not mere nice words; they are the names of tremendous powers, able to transform in a literal sense human personality and make it more and more that which it is meant to be—the agent of the Holy Spirit in the world. Plainly then, it is essential to give time or to get time somehow for self-training in this love and this prayer, in order to develop those powers. It is true that in their essence they are “given,” but the gift is only fully made our own by a patient and generous effort of the soul. Spiritual achievement costs much, though never as much as it is worth. It means at the very least the painful development and persevering, steady exercise of a faculty that most of us have allowed to get slack. It means an inward if not an outward asceticism: a virtual if not an actual mysticism.

—*Concerning the Inner Life*, 1-17

## THE INSIDE OF LIFE

Dr. James Martineau, the great Unitarian divine, used to tell a story of a young American, cultivated, intelligent and prosperous, who had come to Europe expressly to ask his advice. The American had no beliefs, except the belief that religion was a mischievous illusion; and for ten year years he had steadily and publicly attacked religion with considerable success. But after a time he had somehow got uneasy. He had begun to feel that perhaps after all something was left out of his reading of life; that one could not be sure that all the side of existence which religion represents was mere delusion. And so he had given up his work and come to Europe; because he felt that he must find out whether there was something in religion after all. And now the question was: How was he going to find out?

Here was Dr. Martineau's prescription. He said:

You must give yourself a year; and you must spend that year in the same country, and with people of the same race. Live for the first six months among simple, slow-minded, narrow, even superstitious peasants, brought up in and practising a rigid traditional faith. Share their lives as intimately as you can. And then go for the second six months to alert, cultured, modern intellectuals, who have given up and despise all Church and all religion. And then ask yourself: which of these two groups of people—if either—has got that mysterious thing, a hold on the secret of life? Which

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knows best how to meet the deepest, most crucial realities of life—birth—suffering—joy—passion—sin—failure—loneliness—death?

So the American went to Germany for a year, and then returned to report. He had spent six months in the home of a Westphalian peasant family; devout, narrow, ignorant, slow-minded and prejudiced people, full of superstitions, always treading on his toes, always offending his taste. "And what," said Dr. Martineau, "did they know of how to meet the deep realities of birth and death, love, suffering, sin?" The American said, "Everything." They seemed to have a sure touch, a wonderful conviction that went far beyond the crude way in which it was expressed. Their lives were entirely grasped and penetrated by something greater than themselves. And then he had spent six months in the student world of Berlin; among delightful, intelligent, keen-witted people, entirely emancipated from all moral and religious prejudices, with whom he had felt most sympathetic and thoroughly at home. "And what about these?" said Dr. Martineau. "How did they meet the dread and unescapable realities of life?" The American said, "They were helpless." No clue, no inwardness.

Now I think that this story expresses with peculiar vividness the real cause of the so-called modern dilemma, in so far as it concerns religion. The cause, I believe, is the contrast, the opposition which modern life and modern culture tend to set up between breadth and depth; between the sharply focused scientific truth which quickened the students' minds, and the dim, deep spiritual truth which nourished the peasants' souls. I suppose what the American had learned from his experience was this: that the life of those peasants, however rough and uncultured, had an invisible aim running through it which ennobled it. God and the soul mattered more to them than anything else. Their being was rooted in eternal realities. And this attitude of reverence towards the fundamental mysteries of our existence gave them in life's deepest moments an immense advantage over mere cleverness. The life of the Berlin intellectuals, so free, keen, alert and delightful, had no aim or significance beyond itself, no reverence. Confronted by the awful mysteries within which we move, they were without guidance or defence. They had no root in anything that endures. And those two groups of people, one rather dull and slow and faithful, the other very quick, critical, progressive; these exhibit, each in an exclusive way, the two great movements which are possible to the human spirit—one inwards, the other outwards. And both those movements are needed for a full, deep, and real human life.

Because we are twofold creatures, we are not happy, we are not secure, we are not fully alive, until our life has an inside as well as an outside. We need the deeps of the world of spirit, as well as the wide and varied outer world of knowledge and of sense.

And here is where our modern dilemma comes in. Our generation has made such immense discoveries, has achieved such undreamed enrichments of the outside of life, that it has rather lost touch, I think, with the inside of life. It has forgotten the true riches and beauties of its spiritual inheritance: riches and beauties that go far beyond our modern chatter about values and ideals. The human mind's thirst for more and more breadth has obscured the human heart's craving for more and more depth. . . .

To put the whole matter in another and more homely way, the real modern dilemma is how we are going to reconcile the sort of truth declared in *The Mysterious Universe* with the sort of truth declared in "Hark! the herald angels sing." One series of truths belongs to life's outside—the other series belongs to life's inside. And to be a complete human being means to be in touch with both those worlds. The vast world of nature, stern and entrancing, where we are learning to spell out more and more of the poetry of God's creative thought: and the more vast, more stern, more entrancing world of spiritual experience, which alone gives meaning to that marvellous outer scene. . . .

The special form which it takes in our day seems to be this. Because the outer world and outer life are changing so much and so quickly, always showing us new possibilities, adding more and more new powers and experiences to our natural life, we feel that the inner world and its experiences have somehow become discredited and old-fashioned; that they have got to change too. We need a new heaven to match the new earth. But does that really follow? Six hundred years ago St. Francis, praying aloud when he thought himself unobserved, found nothing to say but this: "My God and All! What art Thou? And what am I?" And in spite of the modern knowledge we are so proud of, the human soul is saying that still.

As a matter of fact, those remarkable changes that strike us so much when we observe the modern scene are mostly on life's surface. There are very few changes at life's heart. That is why great literature, however ancient, always moves us and is always understood. It has to do with the unchanging heart of life. And it is in the heart, not on the surface, that the world of religion makes itself known. "With Thee is the well of life, and in Thy light we see light." Does the theory of relativity really make any difference to that? I do not think so. We

do not, after all, reconstruct our married life every time we move into a new and larger flat. The old, sacred intimacies remain. So too, the move-out of the human mind into a new and larger physical world, which is, I suppose, the great fact of our time, does not make any real difference to the soul's relation to God; even though it may make some difference to the language in which we describe Him. And the reason in both cases is surely the same.

The reason is that the deepest and most sacred relationships between human creatures—man and wife, parent and child, teacher and disciple, friend and friend—and the yet deeper relationship between the human creature and its Keeper and Creator, God: these are real facts, which go on and will go on, quite independently of what we think about them, or the degree in which we understand or feel them. If we treat these deep things with contempt, we merely cheapen our own lives. We do not make any difference to truth. If we leave them out, then we get a very incomplete picture of reality; the picture of a world which has an outside but no inside. But we do not alter reality. Clever as we are, we cannot manage that. . . .

One favourite, I might almost say popular, way of attacking the dilemma of faith has always been to seek in nature for some news, some evidence, about the Author of nature. That is of course a method with a very long history; and has always formed one of the strands in human religion. The writer of the eighth Psalm considered the heavens. Christ considered the lilies and the birds; and how characteristic that difference is, that coming down from the cosmic to the small and tender things—just as mysterious, just as holy as the nebula in Orion! "I can't," said Von Hügel, "really know even a daisy—why then should I expect to know the Being of God?" So Plato used the beauty of the earth to mount up to the other beauty. So St. Augustine says, "I understood Thy invisible things by means of the things that are made." And so now, we think we may perhaps find the invisible Truth in some new way "by means of the things that are made." Because the facts and measurements given to us by physical science disclose a wonderful measure and order in the world, we have been told that we may think of the Will behind the world as that of a great Mathematician. But if we think a bit about all those factors in life which suggest anything rather than mathematics—if we ask how a mathematical world is going to produce and to feed the lover, the poet, the saint—and then remember that some ultimate origin, some meaning must be found for them too, because they are real facts within the world; then we see that the guess about the Mathematician is no more

adequate to man's experience of God and His creation, than the cook's guess that the Matterhorn must be a triumph of divine confectionery.

Turn now from all these attempts to explain the mysterious universe in the terms of our own little needs and notions and activities. Listen to the awestruck and delighted language of the Saints, who know the difference between the surface and the depths of life, and know that it is always depth which matters most.

Oh, Thou Supreme! most secret and most present, most beautiful and strong! What shall I say, my God, my Life, my Holy Joy! What shall any man say when he speaks of Thee?

That is St. Augustine. You are well beyond mathematics there, aren't you? Here is another—a woman this time:

The eyes of my soul were opened, and I beheld the fullness of God. So that through excess of marvelling my soul cried out with a loud voice, saying: This whole world is full of God! and I understood how small a thing the whole world is—the abyss, the ocean, and all things, and how the power of God exceeds and fills all!

"I abode," says another, "with a holy marvelling delight, joying in that which I saw."

There you see man standing at the spire-top of his spirit; forgetting himself and his own small affairs, gazing out on the unchanging immensities with awe and delight.

What about all that? Are we going to ignore this science of the Saints, just as real and solid as any other kind of science, because it deals with invisible things? These men and women belong to a race that never dies out. In them we see the spirit of man gazing at reality; and not making guesses about reality, not trying to make it fit his own ideas, but swept by wonder and love. Wonder and love—those are great characters of the human spirit. All art is born of them and all religion too. It is wonder and love, more than any other two qualities, that make the difference between the human tadpole and the human frog. I am sure it is of the very essence of the modern dilemma to find a reading of reality which will give wonder and love—both together, not one alone—full value and full scope. . . .

And surely modern men, gazing at the inconceivable vastness and splendour of the universe which science has disclosed to us, should be ready for this. That vision of the infinitely great and the infinitely small; and of the Mind of God, brooding over that universe, moulding it at every level and in every detail with the zest and inerrancy of



love—this enlarging of our horizons and unselfing of our vision invites us, does it not, to worship and awe?

Adoration is the unchanging heart of religion, and the only key to its mysterious truth. There is no dilemma for the adoring soul.

—*Collected Papers*, 69-121

## FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

We all know pretty well why we come into Retreat: we come to seek the opportunity of being alone with God and attending to God, in order that we may do His will better in our everyday lives. We have come to live for a few days the life of prayer and deepen our contact with the spiritual realities on which our lives depend—to recover if we can our spiritual poise. We do not come for spiritual information, but for spiritual food and air—to wait on the Lord and renew our strength—not for our own sakes but for the sake of the world.

Now Christ, who so seldom gave detailed instruction about anything, did give some detailed instruction for that withdrawal, that recollection which is the essential condition of real prayer, real communion with God.

"Thou when thou prayest, enter into thy closet—and *shut the door.*" I think we can almost see the smile with which He said those three words: and those three words define what we have to try to do. Anyone can retire into a quiet place and have a thoroughly unquiet time in it—but that is not making a Retreat! It is the shutting of the door which makes the whole difference between a true Retreat and a worried religious week-end.

*Shut the door.* It is an extraordinarily difficult thing to do. Nearly every one pulls it to and leaves it slightly ajar so that a whistling draught comes in from the outer world, with reminders of all the worries, interests, conflicts, joys and sorrows of daily life.

But Christ said Shut, and He meant Shut. A complete barrier deliberately set up, with you on one side alone with God and everything else without exception on the other side. The voice of God is very gentle; we cannot hear it if we let other voices compete. . . .

The object of Retreat is not intercession or self-exploration, but such communion with Him as shall afterwards make you more power-

ful in intercession; and such self-loss in Him as shall heal your wounds by new contact with His life and love.

You would hardly enter the presence of the human being you most deeply respected and loved in the state of fuss and preoccupation and distraction in which we too often approach God. You are to "centre down" as the Quakers say, into that deep stillness which is the proper atmosphere of your soul. Remain with God. Wait upon the Light. Speak to your heavenly Father who is in secret. These are the words that describe the attitude of the soul really in Retreat. Do not think now of the world's state and needs and sufferings or of your problems and responsibilities; this is not the time for that. Do not think too much about your own sins. A general, humble, but very tranquil act of penitence and acknowledgment of your faultiness is best. "Commune with your Father which is in secret." There is always something dark, hidden, secret, about our real intercourse with God. . . .

The Light, Life and Love of God—which are all the same thing really—are aspects of His Being, His Living Presence, and will be disclosed in the silence to each soul according to its capacity and need. Let us try to see our situation in that large and general way: our small, imperfect little souls, waiting here on the Eternal God, already fully present in His splendour; and His living Spirit, which is His Love, gradually penetrating and fertilizing all our lives; reaching into and transforming the most humble activities of those lives, making them what God wants them to be.

When we shut the door, we did not shut any part of ourselves away from God—not even the most irreligious bits. Wait with much confidence. He may take as fuel for the fire upon His altar, the most unexpected bit—something we had never thought of in connection with our spiritual lives. So let us offer *all* that we have and are and give thanks.

—*The Fruits of the Spirit*, 1-3

## THE ESSENCE OF PURGATION

We are apt to think of "mortification" as a codified moral discipline, imposed from without on the soul; whereas it really arises from the very character of the spiritual life, and is above all an evidence of growth. It is the name of those inevitable changes which the psyche

## SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR THE DEVOTIONAL LIFE

must undergo, in the transfer of interest from self to God. Active purification represents the simple effort of our embryonic faith, hope and charity—three aspects and expressions of one state, or tendency to God, as realized by understanding will and heart—to capture and rule the house of the soul, and vanquish all hostile powers. Passive purification is best understood as a part of the Spirit's general creative action on us; given through circumstances and interior movements, and felt specially in the pressure of His demands on our innate self-will and self-love. . . .

We must think of the pressure and penetration of God, on and through His many-levelled living Universe, as steady and continuous. This discovery of the ceaseless Divine action, perhaps the most crucial experience of life, is the clue to the mysterious facts of purification and prayer. Once recognized and trusted, it emancipates us from all slavery to particular methods and guides. We now realize ourselves to be directly moved and led by Spirit; always equally sanctifying, whether its cleansing action reach us by outward events, duty, suffering, mental life, or prayer. We, at each point, are more or less susceptible to that purifying action, according to the way in which we use our limited freedom; our capacity for docility, effort, suffering and love. This susceptibility will normally be manifested in our response to the stimulus of events; and more profoundly, in the movements of the soul in prayer. The bracing, bending, softening and reordering which the alertly loving spirit then desires and asks, are commonly given to it through the homely frictions and demands of daily life; sweetened and sanctified, because through and in them are discerned the personal touch and Presence of the Spirit, Who alone knows the path of every creature and is for that creature at once Way, Truth and Life. . . .

Thus we see that the common notion of the "purgative way" as merely the equivalent of moral self-conquest, is not adequate to the deep facts of the spiritual life. Though it is true that the opening phase of that life will commonly involve direct conflict with obvious faults, the real purification of the soul is not an unpleasant experience of limited duration—a drastic supernatural "cure"—to which we must submit ourselves in order to be "disinfected of egoism," and released from the tyranny of the instinctive life. Those who prefer the neatness of the museum label to the disconcerting actuality of the living soul, always tend to describe as successive experiences which are really simultaneous; and sometimes they become the dupes of their own tidiness. They like to arrange the inner life in a series of stages, each

to be completed and left behind. But this convenient diagram has only a symbolic relation to the real facts. That strange necessity of love which we know and experience within the time-series as "purification," is really an effect of the eternal action of the Divine Charity; reaching and touching our souls through events. That touch and action must mean suffering, till our disharmony with God is done away; but takes an ever more subtle and interior form as our life develops, and its centre of interest passes from the sensible to the intellectual, and at last to the spiritual sphere. Thus the purifying demand seems to us to proceed step by step with the growth of that life; till the whole of the intellectual and spiritual being, no less than the instinctive nature, is simplified, cleansed of self-interest, and transformed in God.

Moreover, as the growing spirit comes to realize this process as an essential and permanent strand in its true life, so its own acts of humble and loving correspondence, its secret renunciations and faithful acceptance, will grow in purity and depth. Then the very discipline of purification becomes a means of communion, and deepens into prayer; more and more laying open the soul to the flood of the Spirit's unmeasured life.

—*The Golden Sequence*, 99-104

## CLEANSING OF THE SENSES

For the soul, as St. Teresa saw, is one and indivisible. It is the whole invisible reality of our being; the immaterial self which informs and uses the total mechanism of body and mind, and by means of that mechanism responds to the various attractions and demands of our mixed environment. And the question for man is, where shall the centre of its energies be placed? In that vigorous, instinctive life we share with the animals; which is rooted in the time-series, and totally concerned with the satisfaction of desire and the maintaining of our foothold in the physical world? Or in that "fine point of the spirit" which is turned towards God and craves for God? . . . There is no desire which belongs so entirely to the senses that it leaves the spirit untouched; whilst in the best and purest of our supposed "spiritual" experiences, there is always some admixture of sense. Even our final beatitude is held by Christian theology to depend somehow on the continued possession of "body" as well as "soul."

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So our biological inheritance must be the first matter of purification, because it cannot be left behind without tearing our very selves in two. The great energies of "nature" must be transformed and brought into line, if human personality is fully to serve the purposes of "grace." Hence the conflict which is an inevitable part of all spiritual growth. For the deepest soul, the most interior self, since it is spirit, must always when awakened say to the indwelling and enveloping Presence which is creating it—"Strip me, scourge me, cleanse me, take me and subdue me to Thy purpose. Lo! I come to do Thy will."...

But sensitive nature, in and through which the spirit must support itself in the time-series, and there receive and manifest the Divine Action, rebels against this austere demand for the ordering of its love. It desires its own satisfactions, clings to its own universe, plays for its own hand. Even when the crude egoistic impulses to self-assertion and greed have been subdued upon the physical level—those acquisitive, lustful, combative tempers which the race carries forward as untransformed energy from its sub-human past—they merely transfer their energies to the spiritual sphere. A selfish, greedy and acquisitive attitude towards the attractions of spirit replaces a selfish, greedy and acquisitive attitude towards the attractions of sense. Spiritual pride, spiritual envy and spiritual gluttony are not less hostile to God than their carnal counterparts; for they mean that the soul's true life is still turned inwards on self. The stain of self-interest lies on its prayer and dries up its adoration, the poison of spiritual egoism saps its health. And only the purging action of Spirit, humbly asked and bravely endured, can set this situation right.

Thus one and the same law of tranquil self-oblivion must be applied to the whole house of the soul; not only to the lower story, but to the upper as well—that region of spiritual desire, where our secret self-love so often finds a lair. For only in the tranquillity which is achieved by the death of all personal demand can the delicate impulses of the Spirit be discerned. And this we can only win by turning the whole of our instinctive life in a new direction, away from self-fulfilment however noble, and towards entire self-mergence in God; setting its vigorous love in order, giving it without reserve to the purposes of the Will. Here psychology and religion go hand in hand. Each recommends the drastic reordering and sublimation of desire, its redemption from self-interest, as the pathway to interior peace: and this redeeming of desire contains in itself that whole purification of the sensitive life, which St. John of the Cross calls the

first of the three nights through which the Godward tending soul is called to pass. First on the natural level and then on the spiritual level "appetite" in the sense of undisciplined and egoistic choice must be renounced. For all the scattered cravings, illusory ambitions and emotional inclinations of the "I" represent so much energy subtracted, so much interest deflected, from the great drive of the "Me" towards God....

And it is surely just because the senses are so mysterious and so holy, that these senses must be cleansed, re-ordered and unselfed. We cannot, in fact, really split ourselves up into "sensual" and "spiritual" man; but in all our varied power of love and suffering, must accept the contributions and the limitations of sense. The Christian cannot avoid the fact that he finds himself within a sacramental order; and cannot correspond with that sacramental order on the level of spirit alone. Sense must intervene in our responses to reality; and cannot, unless docile to the over-ruling Spirit and purged of the infection of desire. This means a steady and courageous shifting of the soul's centre of action from the circumference inwards to its true centre, the deep where it abides in God; and thence a rich and selfless expansion, which is the reward of that preliminary stripping and retreat. Thus it is not a harsh dualism but a profound incarnationalism which requires us to set in order our physical and emotional life, and subordinate all vagrant longings to the single passion for God. "A heart filled with desires," says St. John of the Cross, "knows nothing of liberty."

—*The Golden Sequence*, 108-114

## CLEANSING OF THE MEMORY

That psychic storehouse, with its accumulation of remembered experience—pains and pleasures, repulsions and attractions, images and notions—colours all our reactions to reality, and enchains us to our past. Still more disastrous is the constant presence and penetrating odour of the psychic rubbish-heap; with its smouldering resentments, griefs and cravings, the empty shells that once held living passions, the tight hard balls of prejudice, the devitalizing regrets. All this ceaselessly tempts us to a sterile self-occupation, destructive of that simplicity which is the condition of a self-abandoned love. It reminds us

## SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR THE DEVOTIONAL LIFE

of past sensible and emotional experiences, brings back into consciousness the old wounds to our self-love, old conflicts born of pride, anger, or self-will, and throws up distracting images whenever our minds are quiet.

Especially on our life towards Spirit, the insistent presence of this great well of memories, inclinations, images and dreams, exercises a constant and damaging influence: chaining us to the time-series, and giving past events, griefs and loves an immortal power. For here, God only must be sought, in and for Himself, in a pure and trustful streaming out of will and desire, a single undemanding flight; without the backward glance towards anything already known, relinquished, longed for, or possessed. This entirely confident casting of the little spirit on the great Spirit of God, as birds on the supporting air—in spite of all the drag of the past, and suggestions of the untrustful mind—is that which theology means by the state of Hope. By it the memory whether of sins, fears or sorrows, is purified and sweetened. It is the soul's growing point, and the very means of its self-anchoring in God. . . .

It is not only the dreadful pull of self-occupation, the ingrained tendency of the psyche to turn backwards, rummage among its hoarded experiences, and reflect upon its own ideas, which deflects the undivided movement of the spirit towards God. The uncleansed memory operates disastrously within the very sanctuary of the devotional life. The total uncriticised content of our religious store-cupboard—all its phrases, images and symbols—entering into our apperceptive mass, brings many confusions in its train. We easily become the dupes of our own imaginative and psychological processes (and much of that which passes for "religious experience" falls under this head); taking that which is less than Spirit for a direct intimation of the spaceless and eternal God. Thus we are led to suppose that we know Him, when as a matter of fact we only know our own ideas and feelings about Him; and content ourselves with turning over these unworthy notions and pictures of an unpicturable Reality.

—*The Golden Sequence*, 127-29

## CLEANSING OF THE INTELLECT

When our first crude interpretation of life according to the witness of sense and suggestions of personal desire is transcended, our further and more dangerous claim to interpret Reality in its depth and richness by means of those "rational principles" to which we have attained, must be transcended too; if the intellect is ever to become cleansed of pride, docile to mystery, and accept the limitations within which it can safely work. Since the reality of Spirit cannot possibly be clear to our sense-conditioned understanding, all vivid definition, all appearance of logic and clarity, all attempts to equate "religion" with "science" and make the natural and supernatural fit, are deceptive. For that which is adequate to us can never be adequate to God; nor could a Reality we were able to understand ever quench our transcendental thirst. We have to recognize our intellectual concepts as the useful makeshifts which they really are; paper currency which permits the circulation of spiritual wealth, but must never be mistaken for gold.

For there is no correspondence, no parity, between our most admirable notions and the Being of God; and we only begin to approach a certain obscure knowledge of His presence, when we consent to abandon our arrogant attempts towards definition and understanding, become the meek recipients of His given lights, and the silent worshippers of His unfathomable Reality. Only by a movement of bare faith does the mind really draw near to Him. . . .

So the purification of intellect does not mean the deliberate cultivation of a holy stupidity, nor yet a wholesale retreat from the sensible and the homely: for then we reject the rich ore in which the treasure is hidden, and abandon the only machinery for dealing with it that we possess. It is as human beings, transformed but none the less completely human, that our life toward Spirit must be lived; and within the sensible order to which we are adjusted that we must receive the touch of God. . . . We must never confuse with Him any gift or experience of the contingent world; even though we are seldom able to approach Him in isolation from all sensible signs, or distinguish with certainty substance from accident.

And this is where the stress and difficulty of our mental purgation is more deeply felt. It creates for us a situation which is at once costly, humbling and bracing. It asks a ceaseless tension, a childlike acceptance of the Infinite given to us in and with the finite; which



both redeems us from the risk of mere quietism, and protects us from intellectual pride, the arrogant claim to "know" God. The purifying action drives the soul's centre of action inwards from the circumference to the real ground of its life, where Spirit indwells us; but this withdrawal is balanced by a rich and selfless expansion, a generous outward movement which is the fruit of that preliminary stripping and retreat. The mind is cleansed, quietened and expanded, stops its restless effort to make things fit; is opened to the ceaseless gentle action of the Spirit, which keeps us ever aware that the best of our apparent discoveries and experiences are crumbs with which God feeds us from the infinite storehouse of Truth.

—*The Golden Sequence*, 120-23

## CLEANSING OF THE WILL

This transforming of the will in love, this simplifying and supernaturalizing of the whole drive and intention of our life, by its immersion in the great movement of the Infinite Life, is itself the work of Creative Spirit. It is only possible because that Spirit already indwells the soul's ground, and there pursues the secret alchemy of love; more and more possessing and transmuting us, with every small movement of acceptance or renunciation in which we yield ourselves to the quiet action of God. It is true that the soul hardly perceives the separate moments of this mysterious action; and only by a view which takes in long stretches of experience, can realize the changes which it works. . . .

This cleansing, bracing and transforming of the will and emotional life is the hardest and most searching of all the soul's purifications. For it requires us to take the Cross into the most hidden sanctuary of personality, and complete that living sacrifice which the mortifying of the senses began. Now we must be ready not merely to renounce natural self-fulfilment and consolation, but supernatural self-fulfilment and consolation too; placing ourselves without reserve in the hand of God, and subordinating our small interests to the deep requirements of His mysterious life. As human love only achieves nobility when *Eros* is converted into *Agape*, when crude desire is sublimated, and becomes a self-giving tenderness; so with the craving for God which possesses all awakened souls. Only in so far as it compels

us to a single undemanding act of self-giving can it be reckoned as purged of self-love; and only this simple and unconditioned charity can make of the soul a point of insertion for the action of the Spirit within the human world—a tool of the Divine creative will.

This transformation of the will by Charity is chiefly accomplished, and perhaps most deeply and painfully experienced, in the life of prayer. For here the self-regarding instincts of greed, lust and avarice find their last refuge, and ceaselessly invite the devout to a self-regarding spirituality, a seeking of spiritual enjoyment, a hoarding of spiritual wealth. And here the purging influence of the Love of God is chiefly felt in terms of deprivation. . . . What is asked is the unselfing of the whole drive of our God-given nature, its detachment from all softness and ease, all personal enjoyment and achievement, even of the most apparently spiritual kind: and only the hard lessons of dereliction will accomplish this. It is a rough training, designed to make of those who can endure it the hardy and devoted fellow-workers with Spirit; not the hot-house products of an intensive piety. Charity must not seek her own spiritual comfort, or attribute any importance to her own spiritual apprehensions. As poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things, she must achieve the perfect suppleness, the undivided vigour, of the self-abandoned but energetic will: not the limp acquiescence of the quietist.

—*The Golden Sequence*, 136-42

## FINDING GOD IN DIFFICULT TIMES

September 15, 1933

The most important of these suggestions to you I take to be, trying anyhow to refuse to consider and regret the past. It is done, it has happened—you only weaken yourself by dwelling on mistakes, frustration, etc. (which happen in some form in all lives!). Take the present situation as it is and try to deal with what it brings you, in a spirit of generosity and love. God is as much in the difficult home problems as in the times of quiet and prayer, isn't He? Try specially to do His Will there, deliberately seek opportunities for kindness, sympathy and patience—don't "open up" your bitterness, etc., deliberately but

bring your whole situation *en bloc* into your Godward life. Knock down the partition between living-room and oratory, even if it does mean tobacco smoke and incense get a bit mixed up. I think it a wholesome sign even, though painful, that you feel and see so acutely the disharmony between your attitude to home problems and your love of God. Quietly and humbly acknowledge you have not yet got this right and ask God's grace that you may do it in His way. If you go to Confession now, don't rake over details but make a general statement of repentance for lack of love, tolerance, etc., etc.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 217-18

## DON'T STRUGGLE TO FIND GOD

November 19

Don't struggle to "find proofs of God's existence" when He seems to vanish. Throw your hand in and wait, as quietly as you are able. Do you remember von Hügel in his little book on Prayer compares this experience to meeting a sandstorm in the desert—and says the Arab, then, doesn't struggle with the situation but accepts it, lies down in the sand, covers his head with his mantle, and just waits. That is what you are asked to do. God can't be clear to us all the time—if He were, He would not be great enough to worship. But the more we care, the more we suffer in the cloudy bits. It must be so; and desperate as it seems at the time, it does great things for us. I, certainly, am not one scrap disappointed in you! . . . But I'm very sorry for you; for I know how impossible it is for you to realize that it is, as a matter of fact, all right. Please stay in bed till you are really rested, and after that, don't force yourself to any special religious practices except your Communion, and don't be fierce in preparing for these but go, quite without scruple, however impossible you may be feeling. Otherwise be dormy on the pious side for a bit.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 221-22

## REMEMBER GOD'S OCEAN OF PEACE

October 29

I had a dreadful feeling that I was no real good to you this time, but still, if you only feel you can hang on to me, and say whatever you like—that, I know, is some use! I'm sure the great thing is to remember, so far as one can, God's Ocean of Peace, and the way it abides and holds us safe, right through all our little storms, which can purify us even while they humble and hurt us. As von Hügel says, "it is so much more He who must hold us, than we who must hold Him." And that being so, it is He who must ordain what we are to do for Him; and if He wants bad tools like us, we must not object, but just gratefully get on with it. He knows that the storms in your nature are much more temperamental sufferings than sins—and, being sufferings, you can accept them and add them to the Cross. The root principle I think is (a) since God is all that matters in religion there is never anything to be afraid of in spite of our illusions to the contrary; (b) a Christian can always do something with suffering. Stay as quiet as you can when it happens, and wait till it blows over—then get up and go on.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 225

## OFFERING SUFFERING TO GOD

November 6, 1934

As to that spiritual suffering you speak of, I think it is what some souls, not all, are asked to bear and to offer—their share in the Cross—it's not the same at all as the kind that comes from feeling our disharmony with God. How much of it comes to each of us and for how long, is His affair, not ours—but we must accept it with gratitude and use it as well as we can. I agree that it is very likely that you will be given a good deal of it; and anyhow the radiant, consoled prayer of God's vivid Presence is rather a beginner's prayer really and sooner or later—when God sees you are strong enough—He is certain to use your power of prayer for His redemptive purposes and that is always painful. No one—not the greatest saint—goes on in that lovely light all the time. You will have just common grey weather and storm and

fog and perhaps even intense darkness before you have done—that's all part of the "Leave all and follow Me." But it's all right. I would not forecast anything or try to look ahead or wonder how much you can bear—just leave yourself in God's Hand. "I am with thee, saith the Lord." If you feel a definite pressure to leave contemplative prayer, and pray for others—then you must obey each time. But where it is left to you, give a little time anyhow to acts of simple love towards God. It soothes and braces us to remember His Beauty and be glad of it even when we don't see it at all. I think that's all for the moment—except of course avoiding strain, getting enough fun and so forth.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 238-39

## FEELING: THE TEST OF RELIGION

December 4, 1937

I have read the letter, and the paper you enclosed carefully; and I think the upshot of it all is, that you are still far too much inclined to make *feeling* the test of religion. All that matters in religion is giving ourselves without reserve to God, and keeping our wills tending towards Him. This we can always do; but to *feel* devout, fervent, aware of His presence, etc., is beyond our control. Everyone goes through "dry" times such as you are experiencing. They are of great value as tests of our perseverance, and of the quality of our love; and certainly don't mean that anything is wrong. All lies in how we take them—with patience, or with restlessness. As to the experience you describe, thank God for it; but don't worry if you never again have it. Such things do happen to many people from time to time, and especially at the beginning of a new phase in the spiritual life, but in this life such "awareness" is never continuous and its absence certainly does not necessarily mean that we are stopping it by our own fault. Just be simple and natural with God, ask Him to do with you what He wills, avoid strain and fuss of all kinds, and be careful to keep in charity with all men, and you will have done what is in your power. You say in your letter "below everything, I believe I'm in a way very quiet and happy"—well, *that*, not the fluctuating surface moods, represents your true spiritual state, and is the work of God.

## THE EVELYN UNDERHILL READER

Give Him thanks for it and trust it and don't bother about the variable weather.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 262-63

## PANACEA FOR DISSATISFACTION WITH LIFE

February 16, 1932

I think that restlessness and feeling of dissatisfaction with life is partly physical in origin, and should be met on the natural level of cultivating wholesome interests as much as one possibly can, facing (as you realize) the true facts and accepting them, trying to find happiness in interesting yourself in children and so forth. *All* lives can seem futile and unfulfilled without God but *no* life is futile with Him, is it? It is a question of centring yourself on Him more utterly, and abandoning your will to His. *That* is the string for your beads. If there are great sides of life withheld from you, it is your opportunity, isn't it? to dedicate to God all the love, energy and service which would have gone into them, and be ready and alert to see what He wants of you, perhaps something that seems on the surface quite inconspicuous and humble, but which can be irradiated by the intention which directs it to Him. The "drive," the "roots" are all *there* and not in the particular thing you do, aren't they?

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 201

## PATTERN OF DEVOTION

April 27, 1939

Thinking over our talk yesterday afternoon, I felt that perhaps it might be a help if I jotted down one or two points for you to consider at your leisure, without the worry of trying to remember just what was said! But if on the other hand you don't feel the need of this—then please ignore this letter.

(1) I am sure you ought to go very slowly and quietly—not only for the sake of your mind and body but still more for that of your soul. God in revealing Himself to you, put you at the beginning of a long road, and you must go at His pace, not your own (or mine!).

"Tarry thou the Lord's leisure: be strong and He shall comfort thy heart: and put thou thy trust in the Lord." That is a grand verse for you.

(2) Make up your mind from the first to ignore the ups and downs of the "spiritual climate." There will be for you as for everyone sunny and cloudy days, long periods of dullness and fog, and sometimes complete darkness to bear. Accept this with courage as part of the Christian life. Your conversion means giving yourself to God, not having nice religious feelings. Many of the Saints never had "nice religious feelings"; but they did have a sturdy self-oblivious devotion to God alone. Remember old Samuel Rutherford: "There be some that say, Down crosses and up umbrellas . . . but I am persuaded that we must take heaven with the wind and rain in our face."

(3) Beware of fastidiousness! You are highly sensitive to beauty, and whatever branch of the Church you join there will be plenty of things that offend your taste, although they are religious meat and drink to less educated souls, who are also the children of God! Those dreadful Protestant hymns for instance! (The Roman ones if anything are worse—but I don't suppose you have ever heard such popular favourites as "Daily, daily sing to Mary" or "Sweet Sacrament I thee adore"! ) You interpreted the heavenly music as rather like the best plain-chant. But if God had given the same experience to the charwoman, and He is no respecter of persons, *she* would probably have been reminded of "Onward, Christian Soldiers" or "Abide with me." The Church must provide for all her children at every level of culture and this is a discipline which it is often hard for the educated to accept! It provides splendid training in charity and humility.

(4) I think you ought to have a very simple and unexacting rule for your devotional life; so as to get some order into it, but without worry and strain. Waking early as you do, I think you could at least spend 10-15 minutes with God either waiting silently on Him, praying or adoring, reviewing in His presence the duties, etc., of the coming day, or reading and brooding upon a psalm or a passage in Thomas à Kempis. Also in the last quarter- or half-hour of your afternoon rest, you could do this or read a devotional book. I think you would gain by getting familiar with the psalms, making a list of those that help your prayer and using one at least each day. Psalms 25, 27, 42, 63, 51, 103, 116, 130, 139, 145, 148 for instance; 134 is a nice bed-time psalm!

Read a little of the New Testament every day.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 272-73

## SELF-FORGETFULNESS, GREATEST OF THE GRACES

May 3, 1941

People sometimes get St. John of the Cross by the tail! Self-occupation, including religious self-occupation, is always wrong, though often disguised as an angel of light.

This is the first thing I should say—Just plain self-forgetfulness is the greatest of graces. The true relation between the soul and God is the perfectly simple one of a childlike dependence. Well then, be simple and dependent, acknowledge once for all the plain fact that you have nothing of your own, offer your life to God and trust Him with the ins and outs of your soul as well as everything else! Cultivate a loving relation to Him in your daily life; don't be ferocious with yourself because that is treating badly a precious (if imperfect) thing which God has made.

As to detachment—what has to be cured is desiring and hanging on to things for their own sake and because you want them, instead of offering them with a light hand and using them as part of God's apparatus; people seem to tie themselves into knots over this and keep on asking themselves anxious questions on the subject—but again, the cure is more simplicity! They *must* shake themselves out of their scruples. The whole teaching of St. John of the Cross is directed to perfecting the soul in charity, so that all it does, has, says, is, is transfused by its love for God.

This is not a straining doctrine, though a stern one, as of course it does mean keeping all other interests in their place and aiming at God all the time.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 306-7

## THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

The "Dark Night of the Soul," once fully established, is seldom lit by visions or made homely by voices. It is of the essence of its miseries that the once-possessed power of orison or contemplation now seems wholly lost. The self is tossed back from its hard-won point of vantage. Impotence, blankness, solitude, are the epithets by which those immersed in this dark fire of purification describe their pains. It is this



episode in the life-history of the mystic type to which we have now come. . . .

We may look at the Dark Night, as at most other incidents of the Mystic Way, from two points of view: (1) We may see it, with the psychologist, as a moment in the history of mental development, governed by the more or less mechanical laws which so conveniently explain to him the psychic life of man: or (2) with the mystic himself, we may see it in its spiritual aspect as contributing to the re-making of character, the growth of the "New Man"; his "transmutation in God."

(1) Psychologically considered, the Dark Night is an example of the operation of the law of reaction from stress. It is a period of fatigue and lassitude following a period of sustained mystical activity. "It is one of the best established laws of the nervous system," says Starbuck, "that it has periods of exhaustion if exercised continuously in one direction, and can only recuperate by having a period of rest." However spiritual he may be, the mystic—so long as he is in the body—cannot help using the machinery of his nervous and cerebral system in the course of his adventures. His development, on its psychic side, consists in the taking over of this machinery, the capture of its centres of consciousness, in the interests of his growing transcendental life. In so far, then, as this is so, that transcendental life will be partly conditioned by psychic necessities, and amenable to the laws of reaction and of fatigue. Each great step forward will entail lassitude and exhaustion for that mental machinery which he has pressed into service and probably overworked. When the higher centres have been submitted to the continuous strain of a developed illuminated life, with its accompanying periods of intense fervour, lucidity, deep contemplation—perhaps of visionary and auditive phenomena—the swing-back into the negative state occurs almost of necessity. . . .

We are to expect, then, as a part of the conditions under which human consciousness appears to work, that for every affirmation of the mystic life there will be a negation waiting for the unstable self. Progress in contemplation, for instance, is marked by just such an alternation of light and shade: at first between "consolation" and "aridity"; then between "dark contemplation" and sharp intuitions of Reality. So too in selves of extreme nervous instability, each joyous ecstasy entails a painful or negative ecstasy. The states of darkness and illumination coexist over a long period, alternating sharply and rapidly. Many seers and artists pay in this way, by agonizing periods

of impotence and depression, for each violent outburst of creative energy....

The theory here advanced that the "Dark Night" is, on its psychic side, partly a condition of fatigue, partly a state of transition, is borne out by the mental and moral disorder which seems, in many subjects, to be its dominant character. When they are in it everything seems to "go wrong" with them. They are tormented by evil thoughts and abrupt temptations, lose grasp not only of their spiritual but also of their worldly affairs. . . .

(2) So much for psychology. We have next to consider the mystical or transcendental aspects of the Dark Night: see what it has meant for those mystics who have endured it and for those spiritual specialists who have studied it in the interests of other men.

As in other phases of the Mystic Way, so here, we must beware of any generalization which reduces the "Dark Night" to a uniform experience; a neatly defined state which appears under the same conditions, and attended by the same symptoms, in all the selves who have passed through its pains. It is a name for the painful and negative state which normally intervenes between the Illuminative and the Unitive Life—no more. Different types of contemplatives have interpreted it to themselves and to us in different ways; each type of illumination being in fact balanced by its own appropriate type of "dark."

In some temperaments it is the emotional aspect—the anguish of the lover who has suddenly lost the Beloved—which predominates: in others, the intellectual darkness and confusion overwhelms everything else. Some have felt it, with St. John of the Cross, as a "passive purification," a state of helpless misery, in which the self does nothing, but lets Life have its way with her. Others, with Suso and the virile mysticism of the German school, have experienced it rather as a period of strenuous activity and moral conflict directed to that "total self-abandonment" which is the essential preparation of the unitive life. Those elements of character which were unaffected by the first purification of the self—left as it were in a corner when the consciousness moved to the level of the illuminated life—are here roused from their sleep, purged of illusion, and forced to join the growing stream.

The Dark Night, then, is really a deeply human process, in which the self which thought itself so spiritual, so firmly established upon the supersensual plane, is forced to turn back, to leave the Light, and pick up those qualities which it had left behind. Only thus, by the

transmutation of the *whole man*, not by a careful and departmental cultivation of that which we like to call his "spiritual" side, can Divine Humanity be formed: and the formation of Divine Humanity—the remaking of man "according to the pattern showed him in the mount"—is the mystic's only certain ladder to the Real. . . .

We must remember in the midst of our analysis, that the mystic life is a life of love: that the Object of the mystic's final quest and of his constant intuition is an object of adoration and supreme desire. . . . Hence for the mystic who has once known the Beatific Vision there can be no greater grief than the withdrawal of this Object from his field of consciousness; the loss of this companionship, the extinction of this Light. Therefore, whatever form the "Dark Night" assumes, it must entail bitter suffering: far worse than that endured in the Purgative Way. Then the self was forcibly detached from the imperfect. Now the Perfect is withdrawn, leaving behind an overwhelming yet impotent conviction of something supremely wrong, some final Treasure lost. We will now look at a few of the characteristic forms under which this conviction is translated to the surface-consciousness.

A. To those temperaments in which consciousness of the Absolute took the form of a sense of divine companionship, and for whom the objective idea "God" had become the central fact of life, it seems as though that God, having shown Himself, has now deliberately withdrawn His Presence, never perhaps to manifest Himself again. . . .

B. In those selves for whom the subjective idea "Sanctity"—the need of conformity between the individual character and the Transcendent—has been central, the pain of the Night is less a deprivation than a new and dreadful kind of lucidity. The vision of the Good brings to the self an abrupt sense of her own hopeless and helpless imperfection: a black "conviction of sin," far more bitter than that endured in the Way of Purgation, which swamps everything else. . . .

C. Often combined with the sense of sin and the "absence of God" is another negation, not the least distressing part of the sufferings of the self suddenly plunged into the Night. This is a complete emotional lassitude: the disappearance of all the old ardours, now replaced by a callousness, a boredom, which the self detests but cannot overcome. . . .

D. This stagnation of the emotions has its counterpart in the stagnation of the will and intelligence, which has been experienced by some contemplatives as a part of their negative state. As regards the will, there is a sort of moral dereliction: the self cannot control its inclinations and thoughts. In the general psychic turmoil, all the un-

purified part of man's inheritance, the lower impulses and unworthy ideas which have long been imprisoned below the threshold, force their way into the field of consciousness. . . .

E. There is, however, another way in which the self's sense of a continued imperfection in its relation with the Absolute—of work yet remaining to be done—expresses itself. In persons of a very highly strung and mobile type, who tend to rapid oscillations between pain and pleasure states, rather than to the long, slow movements of an ascending consciousness, attainment of the Unitive Life is sometimes preceded by the abrupt invasion of a wild and unendurable desire to "see God," apprehend the Transcendent in Its fullness: which can only, they think, be satisfied by death. As they begin to outgrow their illuminated consciousness, these selves begin also to realize how partial and symbolic that consciousness—even at its best—has been: and their movement to union with God is foreshadowed by a passionate and uncontrollable longing for ultimate Reality. This passion is so intense, that it causes acute anguish in those who feel it. It brings with it all the helpless and desolate feelings of the Dark Night; and sometimes rises to the heights of a negative rapture, an ecstasy of deprivation. . . .

The self, then, has got to learn to cease to be its "own centre and circumference": to make that final surrender which is the price of final peace. In the Dark Night the starved and tortured spirit learns through an anguish which is "itself and orison" to accept lovelessness for the sake of Love, Nothingness for the sake of the All; dies without any sure promise of life, loses when it hardly hopes to find. It sees with amazement the most sure foundations of its transcendental life crumble beneath it, dwells in a darkness which seems to hold no promise of a dawn. This is what the German mystics call the "upper school of true resignation" or of "suffering love"; the last test of heroic detachment, of manliness, of spiritual courage. Though such an experience is "passive" in the sense that the self can neither enter nor leave it at will, it is a direct invitation to active endurance, a condition of stress in which work is done. . . .

The Dark Night then, whichever way we look at it, is a state of disharmony; of imperfect adaptation to environment. The self, unaccustomed to that direct contact of the Absolute which is destined to become the Source of its vitality and its joy, feels the "soft and gentle touch" of the Following Love as unbearable in its weight. The "self-naughting" or "purification of the will," which here takes place, is

the struggle to resolve that disharmony; to purge away the somewhat which still sets itself up in the soul as separate from the Divine, and makes the clear light of reality a torment instead of a joy. . . .

Only when he learns to cease thinking of himself at all, in however depreciatory a sense; when he abolishes even such selfhood as lies in a desire for the sensible presence of God, will that harmony be attained. This is the "naughting of the soul," the utter surrender to the great movement of the Absolute Life, which is insisted upon at such length by all writers upon mysticism. Here, as in purgation, the condition of access to higher levels of vitality is a death: a deprivation, a detachment, a clearing of the ground. Poverty leaps to the Cross: and finds there an utter desolation, without promise of spiritual reward. The satisfactions of the spirit must now go the same way as the satisfactions of the senses. Even the power of voluntary sacrifice and self-discipline is taken away. A dreadful *ennui*, a dull helplessness, takes its place. The mystic motto, *I am nothing, I have nothing, I desire nothing*, must now express not only the detachment of the senses, but the whole being's surrender to the All. . . .

The "mystic death" or Dark Night is therefore an aspect or incident of the transition from multiplicity to Unity; of that mergence and union of the soul with the Absolute which is the whole object of the mystical evolution of man. It is the last painful break with the life of illusion, the tearing away of the self from that World of Becoming in which all its natural affections and desires are rooted, to which its intellect and senses correspond; and the thrusting of it into that World of Being where at first, weak and blinded, it can but find a wilderness, a "dark." No transmutation without fire, say the alchemists: No cross, no crown, says the Christian. . . .

The act of complete surrender then, which is the term of the Dark Night, has given the self its footing in Eternity; its abandonment of the old centres of consciousness has permitted movement towards the new. In each such forward movement, the Transcendental Self, that spark of the soul which is united to the Absolute Life, has invaded more and more the seat of personality; stage by stage the remaking of the self in conformity with the Eternal World has gone on. In the misery and apparent stagnation of the Dark Night—that dimness of the spiritual consciousness, that dullness of its will and love—work has been done; and the last great phase of the inward transmutation accomplished. The self which comes forth from the night is no separated self, conscious of the illumination of the Uncreated Light, but the

New Man, the transmuted humanity, whose life is *one* with the Absolute Life of God.

—*Mysticism*, 381-402

## FACE THE DARK NIGHT WITH COURAGE

January 10, 1934

I'm glad you wrote and I think you have managed to express the situation on paper quite clearly. It is a perfectly usual situation and one that anyone being led by God along your path is bound to have to face, sooner or later. I know how horrible it is but it is a fine test of loyalty and courage. All you are required to do about it is to keep as calm as you can and go through with it, making your chief prayer to God deliberate acts of acceptance of the discipline He has sent you. That scrupulous fear that, after all, you did not love God for Himself alone but there was an element of self-seeking in it, is part of the experience and shows too what it is meant to do for you—namely, purify your love.

We all need that. He draws us first by our own needs and longing and then afterwards, when we can stand it, to a pure love which does not even secretly desire reward. The transition, when the jam-jar is removed from the nursery table and only the loaf is left—is very bitter to our babyish spirits but *must* happen if we are to grow up. It is St. John of the Cross's *Night of the Senses* you have come to. Face the fact, and trust God and not your own miserable sensations. You are being made to dissociate love from feeling and centre it on the *will*, the only place where it is safe! This does not mean feeling has gone for ever, or ardour, or joy. They are to come back, at God's moment not yours, in a far better, deeper form. It is rather like one of the long stuffy tunnels in a mountain railway—they seem to go on and on, and then suddenly we come out, one stage higher up the mountain than we went in. . . .

I know the distaste for Holy Communion does seem the last straw. But again, it can remove the emphasis from what He gives, to the total, abandoned giving of yourself. Do not reduce your Communions, but do not try to beat yourself up into a "suitable" stage of mind and soul. Take them as an act of loving obedience.

Do not add to your prayer—even reduce mental prayer a little if it

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is a great strain—and replace by Offices or vocal prayer, offered, however dryly and coldly, as an act of service. Keep quiet inwardly and let God act. Don't dash about trying to get out of the fog and do not be frightened. He is in it, and is working on your soul through it. You will find it a help to put as much of yourself as you can in the active side just now—practical work for others, etc., and offer that. Don't be worried—all is well. It is God you want and God Who wants you.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 230-31

## QUESTION ABOUT SLEEPING

May 5, 1935

You should take Fr. X.'s directions about sleeping, and a more ordered life, very seriously indeed. Of course, he expects you to carry out what he said! And, though I fully understand it is quite against your whole temperament, if you *would* make a simple rule and stick to it regardless, you would find it bracing and quieting, and would get all that really needs doing done! If as I expect you don't have breakfast till 8:30 or 9, three-quarters of an hour for prayer and reading could surely come before that if you go to bed in reasonable time? You once mentioned letter-writing as one of the things which kept you up late—it is also one of the things that should be disciplined, both as to length and frequency! No letter-writing after 10:15, as an act of obedience to God, would probably bring a quite new sense of leisure, and no one would be a penny the worse. It looks impossible till you do it, and then you find it is possible.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 251

## ON SELF-EXAMINATION

February 6, 1912

Now about self-examination. These general vague examinations are very apt to be deceptive and featureless particularly with a life and character of your type. Drop that now, and take up the "particular examination." Pick out a fault or lack which you recognize in your-

self, and which comes out, however subtly, in your daily life. Whatever you find yourself most "up against"—pride, lack of loving response (to life in general, as well as to God in particular), slackness, depression—whatever it is. Watch that, and that only. Try if you have time in the middle of the day to glance back over the morning and see if you have fallen into it. Pull yourself together and make an act of contrition as regards that. At night, count up how many times you have committed it. *Write down the number*: and look a little into the circumstances of each. You will not find this tends at all to self-glorification, at first at any rate. But it is solid work in character-building and very bracing, definite and wholesome. . . .

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 131-32

## RULES FOR SPIRITUAL LIVING

August 1, 1927

Now as to your future course:

(1) I don't think you should, at present anyhow, try to "go on alone." You must expect ups and downs, difficulties, etc.,—and it is much better you should have someone to whom you can tell them and who can look at your situation in a detached way. So I hope you will continue to write when you feel it is necessary.

(2) Yes, I am sure your feeling that you should do some kind of spiritual work is sound and there is no reason to think that what you are most drawn to (Intercession and Healing) is unsuitable. On the contrary, other things being equal, one should always first try to follow one's spiritual *attrait*; though moderately and gradually, *not* exclusively and vehemently! So go gently in this direction, in the way and degree in which God suggests and opens ways for you, but balance it by your personal communion with Our Lord, in prayer, sacraments and reasonable voluntary renunciations.

(3) (Of great importance.) Develop and expand the wholesome, natural and intellectual interests of your life—don't allow yourself to concentrate on the religious side only. Remember *all* life comes to you from God, and is to be used for Him—so live in it all, and so get the necessary variety and refreshment without which religious intensity soon becomes stale and hard. . . . You will in this way retain, in the long run, far more of the sense of God's Presence than you



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would get from feverish concentration on it. Religious fervour eludes us when we chase it; but creeps back unawares. It is crucial that you should get these truths firmly fixed in your mind *now*, as they will have to govern your conduct (and so your growth) for years to come.

God bless you.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 175

## RULE OF LIFE FOR MEMBERS OF THE PRAYER GROUP

I. At least twenty minutes each day to be spent in prayer and Bible reading.

II. It is hoped that all who can do so will receive Holy Communion every Sunday; and in any event not less than once a month.

III. A solid religious book to be kept in hand and read for not less than one hour each week. This may be the life or works of a Saint, a book on the philosophy of religion, prayer, the spiritual life, etc. A list of suitable books will be provided.

IV. Self-discipline is an essential part of the Christian life. So we must have in our Rule some acts of deliberate self-denial; restricting small luxuries or pleasures such as sweets, novels or cigarettes on Fridays and in Lent, living as simply as we can and giving a proportion of our money in charity, and of our time in acts of kindness.

—*The Fruits of the Spirit*, 44

## CHRISTIANS ARE KIND TO THEMSELVES

Quinquagesima, 1936

As to your Lent—no physical hardships beyond what normal life provides—but take each of these as serenely and gratefully as you can and make of them your humble offering to God. Don't reduce sleep. Don't get up in the cold. Practise more diligently the art of turning to God with some glance or phrase of love and trust at all spare moments of the day. Read a devotional book in bed in the morning, and strive in every way to make the ordinary discipline of life

of spiritual worth. Be specially kind and patient with those who irritate you! And make of this effort an offering to God. Instead of wasting energy in being disguised with yourself, *accept* your own failures, and just say to God, "Well, in spite of all I may say or fancy, this is what I am really like—so please help my weakness." This, not self-disgust, is the real and fruitful humility. . . .

Please be very kind to yourself (Christians must always be kind to animals, including their own animal part!) and get quite well.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 252

### PUTTING HER RULE INTO EFFECT (Summer 1922)

1. *Invisible religion*. Inwardly, till the last few weeks, I have had rather a rough time. When I came to you I was frantic and feverish, and afterwards that got worse, and got altogether too near the psychophysical danger zone. I had to stop it, with resulting dimness, great restlessness, and not knowing what to be at. Then, by the beginning of Lent, I got into a state of vague, increasing inward suffering and struggle, as if one were fighting shadows and more and more obsessed by the feeling of sin. I could not think of anything else and lost my spiritual world view. It was just as if one's soul were being scorched. Useless to tell myself I had got to practise self oblivion—impossible to forget it except when with my poor people. I was beginning to be faintly Christocentric then, but it spoilt my communions, and I dreaded my times of prayer—they meant dimness, incapacity, pain and horrible remorse. By Holy Week I was so tortured I decided to go and make a general confession; first because I had always loathed the idea, so it would be something definite to do, and second, I thought perhaps it would be like a spring cleaning, and I would be all right afterwards. Probably I ought not to have done it without your permission, but I felt I must.

It was not a bit like a spring cleaning, and I did not feel a scrap absolved; but as a humiliation it left absolutely nothing to be desired. It is one thing to make voluntary acts of abjection to God and quite another thing when a human being forces you to recognize your own beastliness. You were much too kind to do this, but the man I went to devoted his time to smashing me up . . . when he had finished I felt utterly degraded, hopeless and smirched all over. The very next day I found two horrible insects kissing one of my slum children.

Of course you will laugh at this or feel I should not bother you with such trifles. But the point is on the top of all the rest it seemed to complete the ruin of my self-respect and filled me with horror and self-loathing. I felt vile through and through, body and soul, just rubbed in the mud.

And the queer thing is, it was then—when I could not look at or think of transcending holiness, that I realized what the agonizing need is that only Christianity *can* meet by coming right down to one in the dust. *St. Augustine was a thousand times right!* Plotinus can never have had to face his own beastliness. Neo-Platonism goes to bits when one gets really to the bottom and knows oneself un-mendably displeasing to God.

I stayed at the bottom for weeks with occasional moments of peace, but mostly suffocated by the unescapable sense of sin and utter loneliness. I confess I had times of the blackest depression, when it seemed the strain could not be borne, or the utter loneliness. Religion seemed suddenly to have become savage and unrelenting. Gradually it wore off a bit and I crept out, but miserably conscious I should never be any good.

Then at Ascension tide I went into retreat at Pleshey. This was not another case of taking the law into my own hands—the Warden is a friend of mine, and I had promised to go, before you took charge of me. I went with a lot of Elementary School Teachers from the East End. It helped me a good deal. [I think this was probably only the second time that Evelyn had definitely gone to a religious house to learn and to pray; the first, of course, being her visit to the convent. This visit to Pleshey, when she was in such great need, was the beginning of the long connection between her soul and that place which became so dear to her, and which she made so lovely and strengthening to others. One ought to mark it in this book with the white stone which the first Christians used to single out any specially sacred day.]

The intense silence seemed to slow down one's far too quick mental time and give one's soul a chance. To my surprise a régime of daily communion and four services a day with silence between was the most easy unstrained and natural life I had ever lived. One sank down into it, and doing it always with the same people, all meaning it intensely, and the general attitude of deep devotion—for the whole house seems soaked in love and prayer—cured solitude and gave me at last the feeling of belonging to the Christian family and not counting except as that. I lost there my last bit of separateness and wish for anything of my own, and gained a wholly new sense of the real-

ness and almost unbearable beauty of the Christian life. I came away quite tranquil and determined on entire surrender and so far have not wavered from that—though again and again I have fallen far below it and done and said things inconsistent with it. Anyhow I know now what I ought to be like, if my love were of a better quality.

*The general result* of these adventures, as far as one can make them out is: I have lost the violent and overwhelming sort of consciousness I had six months ago; and also lost, alas! (for many months now) the prayer of quiet which seems a real set back. But I have a dimmer, but on the whole steadier sense; varying a good deal in character and intensity and often only a vague background feeling—but seldom past recall—though there are utterly blank days. Much gentler than it was, and yet more penetrating and spreading in a way.

My old religious life now looks too thin and solitary: this is more various—contemplating, Holy Communion, the felt presence of God, struggles to behave properly, and love for my poor people—all seem articulated points of it. All sense of contact departs abruptly the minute I become critical or horrid or fail in love and patience, or otherwise fall below my none too high standard.

As to practices: what help and feed me most are Holy Communion and short, constant bits of recollection and prayer (when I am not too rushed to forget them). The Retreat was like a week on the glaciers—bracing, purifying and calming. I should like to do this several times a year—it would be time well spent. On the other hand I think regular confession would wreck me altogether. It tears me to bits, leaves me in a state of nervous illness, and encourages my hateful and unconquerable habit of introspection. Apart from Holy Communion I cannot honestly say church-going attracts me much, and I seldom go to Benediction now. Silent prayer seems as easy and fruitful at home as in church. . . .

2. *Visiting the poor.* This prescription has been a complete success. I realize now I was starving for something of the kind. It is an immense source of interest, often of a heartbreaking kind; for they are always in some trouble and misery, poor darlings, often actually hungry—and it is little one can do to rescue them. I got eight families from a friend who had wrecked her health by devoted work for them and others, and as they adored her I come in quite second best (although all are great friends with me) so there is no food for vanity. On the contrary one comes away feeling an utter worm: comparing one's own secure life with their incessant struggles and anxieties and the amazing courage and sweetness with which they bear it. The

women are perfectly wonderful. If I were like a particular friend, living in a basement with six restless children, poor health, endless difficulties, and a drunken cruel beast of a man to whom she is not even married, I should go completely to bits. It all makes one feel, religiously, as well as physically, rather pampered. I think more and more unless one can stretch out one's own devotional life to make it avail for them (for they have not any, and how can they have?), it remains more or less a spiritual luxury. But I do not see how to do this in any real way at present. Nor, except for getting one baby baptized, have I yet found any outlet for religion. It is mostly a case of being a family friend and cheerer-up—not at all a spiritual job! Of course, sometimes it is taxing and a bit of an effort, but on the whole a source of real happiness, not mortification, so the screw will have to be put on somewhere else. The queer thing is the tranquillizing effect they have. However jangled one may be when one goes to them, one always comes away mysteriously filled with peace and nearer God. You were absolutely right; they give one far more than one can ever give them, and I feel I ought to give them a much greater love and compassion than I do. Of course, the temptation is to concentrate on the most attractive, but I try not to do that. I'm afraid a great deal of time is spent simply consorting with the little kiddies and feeding them with chocolate. This is not a very elevated occupation, I know, but it means a lot to me. You see when you have none of your own it does rather freeze you up; and I am too shy and awkward to get on with educated kids. But these are such nice friendly appealing little creatures, like tiny flowers in those grimy places; and one can enjoy them without self-consciousness or anyone knowing. I can't tell you what a sense of expansion and liberation I have got from this. . . .

3. *Direction work.* I have not had much to do in this except keeping one or two old cases going; but am now doing more than before in the way of instructions, addresses to guilds, collections of clergymen, etc. (!), I think I had better take all this sort of work that offers as it is direct and inconspicuous and seems really to be needed.

4. *Detachment and general behaviour.* (a) Really, because I have been so absorbed in religious interest and struggles, I have not felt the old temptation to exactingness, etc., in personal relations, but expect it is only dozing and not killed. I still find people attractive but can now take friendships less intensely. All the same, in many ways I am still absurdly over-sensitive, and easily tipped off my spiritual balance by worries and vexations, though I do stamp down this sort

of thing, and refuse to luxuriate in it and so scramble back, rather more quickly than before. It is a struggle to leave all one's professional vanity at the foot of the Cross—but unless I can do this, I may as well give up altogether.

(b) Even although I manage to stifle a good bit of my boundless impatience, capacity for exasperation, and snappy temper (formerly written off as due to nerves and overwork), still, some pops out if I am off my guard and the rest seethes inside for a bit. All the same one *can* win these battles, if not at the moment, at least next day.

(c) All the strains and conflicts come in with ordinary active life, professional and social intercourse, family duties, perpetual scrimmage to adjust rival claims and fit everything in: opportunities of accepting boring things, etc. Here I don't think I improve. I pick out objects of devotion instead of taking obvious and unattractive ones. Though except when nervous and cross, I do find people in general far more lovable, and feel more tolerant and less critical towards them; still I fail perpetually in gentleness, love, and abnegation. One trues oneself up on Sunday, but it peters out very soon.

(d) I am also very cowardly (I like to call it reserve) about my mostly pagan friends, and entirely non-church-going family, suspecting how much I care for religion: and descend to almost any evasions and concealment to avoid this. I live in nervous terror of discovery, make elaborate plans to get to Holy Communion unobserved, and let my rule lapse when staying with people rather than seem pious. This is despicable from one point of view but all the same there is a horribleness in letting one's treasure be seen.

(e) As for self-oblivion, it seems *hopeless*. Incessant introspection and eternal self-communings seem to possess me: I hate it but can't get away from it. It ruins my prayers very often, and is, I know, altogether wrong. Now and then one gets away from it and all tangles into the depths and is nothing—but this is very seldom and only for a bit.

5. *Prayer.* (a) You told me to practise the kind and degree that "most humbled yet braced." But I can't stick to one kind or degree: I range from complete self-absorption or mixed silence and aspiration (which I think suit me best really) to mere chatterings, vague considerations, and wandering attention. Orderly Three Point Meditations seem impossible and a good deal of the (very short) time you allowed is wasted on distractions. I wish I could have a bit more latitude about this. You see, if one has to scurry round one's house, order meals, etc., just before, it does not put one in the most favour-

able state for recollection; and often most of that half-hour is spent trying to get recollected. On the other hand, when the states of real absorption, which alone are really worth while, happen they take time to get established and then the time is up and I have to break off forcibly. I have been really very obedient about this, but would like to feel freer, and would not, I promise, make it an excuse for religious daydreaming. I would like a minimum of one hour and a maximum of one and a half hours to include morning and night prayers, but not odd five minutes during the day. Also when I can't get to the Carmelites in the afternoon, or only at the price of over-fatigue, to take that quarter of an hour at home instead.

(b) I feel I ought to spend more time in Intercession, and would, if I could feel it did real work. But it is so unreal to me that I forget all about it. Yet I know, when you pray for me, you do somehow bring a tremendous force to bear! And even in my tiny way I ought to be able to do something, especially for the souls I have got to try to help. In general I forget all specific requests—after all why should one ask for things? To bring one's deepest desires and intentions and moral difficulties into the presence of God and hold them there is, of course, tremendously effective, but trying to affect other people's lives in this way seems to me at present to belong more to the realm of idea than to that of concrete fact. I am almost certainly wrong about this, and blinded here as I was in other directions, and I want to get it right. Because I must give my devotional life some redemptive and social character and prevent it getting too thin and vertical.

(c) You said further, my aim must be to keep as continually as possible in the spirit of prayer. Well! I made an awful struggle for this; but if by it you mean *conscious* constant tendance and aspiration of God, it is beyond me. When working it splits my attention hopelessly: and when with other people it vanishes. Although there are whole days in the country when I am much alone, I can do it, there are more when I forget for hours. If, however, you mean only a sort of background awareness, a vertical orientation to God, and now and then a short and very simple recollection for a minute or two, I can more or less do this. But it is too easy and too superficial to be what you really mean, I feel sure.

6. *Christocentric devotion*. I take back with shame every word I said against this. This does not, however, mean a devotional *volte-face*. I am still mainly Theocentric; but the two attitudes are no longer in opposition in my mind; they are two aspects of one thing. Something you said showed me how to bridge the gap between theism and

Christian devotion, which had worried me for years, and latterly had been driving me steadily in a direction not *much* removed from Unitarianism, as you perceived (though I did not at all like it when you said so!). Now I have got my universe all in one piece again. This has meant throwing overboard some Nicene language about pre-existence, eternal generation, etc., and Platonic conceptions of the Logos Christ. But perhaps you will allow me a little latitude here.

7. *Historical values in religion.* Yes! I now fully and solidly accept your position, with no reserves at all; and with a growing feeling in favour of such historical realism, and dislike of fluffy and notional, instead of factual religion. You forced me thoroughly to reconsider my own foundations and realize that a mere philosophy of values, however sublime, has no power to redeem unless these values have been incarnated in human life. The main historical happenings as given by reasonable N.T. criticism—and especially the Passion—are absolutely necessary to Christianity as I understand it. I never doubted their occurrence but they now mean a great deal more to me. Also as regards Holy Communion, the historical link comes in strongly, and at least part of what it seems to me (putting aside the purely spiritual and quite undiscussable aspect) is the feeling of being linked with, and doing the same thing as all the others who have really cared, right from the beginning—and through them, stretching back to the beginning, too; a sort of spiritual time stream. You may say as a non-Catholic I do nothing of the kind, but I do not think you will—anyhow that is how I feel it.

8. *Human and historical contacts necessary.* This is really a continuation and development of the preceding. I feel I do not yet fully understand all you said under this head: but sometimes for a bit I do. Anyhow I thoroughly accept and trust it.

9. *Spiritual dispositions.* Here again, while fully accepting what you say, I have only been able very partially to practise it. The transcendental and incarnational currents are woven together now and there is no opposition between them in my mind. But the incarnational current is still the weakest. If my soul is left to itself, it moves off in the non-spatial, theocentric direction at once. I do try by persistent N.T. reading and meditation to strengthen the strictly Christian side and it is never quite out of my mind—but the other is most vividly and factually present.

10. *Possible change of obedience.* I accept this in theory, though whether I am yet equal to performing it in practice is more doubtful. Frankly I cannot at present conceive the question of submission to



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Rome, as to which this point first came up, ever becoming a case of conscience. In fact I feel now quite satisfied as an Anglican; having discovered a corner I can fit into, and people with whom I can sympathize and work. Still it might happen, and if it did I hope I should not draw back.

—*Life of Evelyn Underhill*, 85-93

## MORTIFICATION OF THE TONGUE

Lammas Day [1937]

I am sure the disciplined life based on the Sermon on the Mount is not easy! After all, it was never intended to be, was it? If you can get an hour a day (as much as possible consecutive and in the morning) you ought I think to be able to handle the situation even though just now the "sacrament of the present moment" may take rather a knobbly sort of form. Still God is in it—and it is there that you have to find a way of responding to Him and receiving Him and are actually being fed by Him. Christianity does mean getting down to actual ordinary life as the medium of the Incarnation, doesn't it, and our lessons in that get sterner, not more elegant as time goes on?

As to deliberate mortifications—I take it you do feel satisfied that you accept *fully* those God sends. That being so, you might perhaps do one or two little things, as acts of love, and also as discipline? I suggest by preference the mortification of the Tongue—as being very tiresome and quite harmless to the health. Careful guard on all amusing criticisms of others, on all complaints however casual and trivial; deliberately refraining sometimes (*not* always!) from saying the entertaining thing. This does not mean you are to be dull or correct! but to ration this side of your life. I doubt whether things like sitting on the least comfortable chair, etc., affect you enough to be worth bothering about! But I'm sure custody of the Tongue (on the lines suggested) could give you quite a bit of trouble and be a salutary bit of discipline, a sort of verbal hair-shirt. I think God does provide quite a reasonable amount of material for self-denial, etc., in your life. This extra bit is for love.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 259

## RECOLLECTION AND QUIET

As Recollection becomes deeper, the self slides into a certain dim yet vivid consciousness of the Infinite. The door tight shut on the sensual world, it becomes aware that it is immersed in a more real world which it cannot define. It rests quietly in this awareness: quite silent, utterly at peace. In the place of the struggles for complete concentration which mark the beginning of Recollection, there is now "a living, somehow self-acting recollection—with God, His peace, power, and presence, right in the midst of this rose of spiritual fragrance." With this surrender to something bigger, as with the surrender of conversion, comes an immense relief of strain. This is "Quiet" in its most perfect form: this sinking, as it were, of the little child of the Infinite into its Father's arms. The giving up of I-hood, the process of self-stripping, which we have seen to be the essence of the purification of the self, finds its parallel in this phase of the contemplative experience. Here, in this complete cessation of man's proud effort to do somewhat of himself, Humility, who rules the Fourth Degree of Love, begins to be known in her paradoxical beauty and power. Consciousness loses to find, and dies that it may live. . . .

The state of "Quiet," we have said, entails suspension of the surface-consciousness: yet consciousness of the subject's personality remains. It follows, generally, on a period of deliberate and loving recollection, of a slow and steady withdrawal of the attention from the channels of sense. To one who is entering this state, the external world seems to get further and further away: till at last nothing but the paramount fact of his own existence remains. . . .

There are, then, two aspects of the Orison of Quiet: the aspect of deprivation, of emptiness which begins it, and the aspect of acquisition, of something found, in which it is complete. In its description, all mystics will be found to lean to one side or the other, to the affirmative or negative element which it contains. . . .

"Quiet" is the danger-zone of introversion. Of all forms of mystical activity, perhaps this has been the most abused, the least understood. Its theory, seized upon, divorced from its context, and developed to excess, produced the foolish and dangerous exaggerations of Quietism: and these, in their turn, caused a wholesale condemnation of the principle of passivity, and made many superficial persons regard "naked orison" as an essentially heretical act. The accusation of Quietism has been hurled at mystics whose only fault was a looseness

of language which laid them open to misapprehension. Others, however, have certainly contrived, by a perversion and isolation of the teachings of great contemplatives on this point, to justify the deliberate production of a half-hypnotic state of passivity. With this meaningless state of "absorption in nothing at all" they were content; claiming that in it they were in touch with the divine life, and therefore exempt from the usual duties and limitations of human existence. . . .

There can be no doubt that for selves of a certain psychical constitution, such a "false idleness" is only too easy of attainment. They can by wilful self-suggestion deliberately produce this emptiness, this inward silence, and luxuriate in its peaceful effects. To do this from self-regarding motives, or to do it to excess—to let "peaceful enjoyment" swamp "active love"—is a mystical vice: and this perversion of the spiritual faculties, like perversion of the natural faculties, brings degeneration in its train. It leads to the absurdities of "holy indifference," and ends in the complete stultification of the mental and moral life. The true mystic never tries deliberately to enter the orison of quiet: with St. Teresa, he regards it as a supernatural gift, beyond his control, though fed by his will and love. That is to say, where it exists in a healthy form, it appears spontaneously, as a phase in normal development; not as a self-induced condition, a psychic trick.

The balance to be struck in this stage of introversion can only be expressed, it seems, in paradox. The true condition of quiet, according to the great mystics, is at once active and passive: it is pure surrender, but a surrender which is not limp self-abandonment, but rather the free and constantly renewed self-giving and self-emptying of a burning love. The departmental intellect is silenced, but the totality of character is flung open to the influence of the Real. Personality is not lost: only its hard edge is gone. . . .

Much of the teaching of modern "mystical" cults is thus crudely quietistic. It insists on the necessity of "going into the silence," and even, with a strange temerity, gives preparatory lessons in subconscious meditation: a proceeding which might well provoke the laughter of the Saints. The faithful, being gathered together, are taught by simple exercises in recollection the way to attain the "Quiet." By this mental trick the modern transcendentalist naturally attains to a state of vacant placidity, in which he rests: and "remaining in a distracted idleness and mispending the time in expectation of extraordinary visits," believes—with a faith which many of the orthodox might envy—that he is here "united with his Principle." But, though the psychological state which contemplatives call the

prayer of quiet is a common condition of mystical attainment, it is not by itself mystical at all. It is a state of preparation: a way of opening the door. That which comes in when the door is opened will be that which we truly and passionately desire. The will makes plain the way: the heart—the whole man—conditions the guest. The true contemplative, coming to this plane of utter stillness, does not desire "extraordinary favours and visitations," but the privilege of breathing for a little while the atmosphere of Love. He is about that which St. Bernard called "the business of all businesses": goes, in perfect simplicity, to the encounter of Perfection, not to the development of himself.

So, even at this apparently "passive" stage of his progress, the mystic's operations are found on analysis to have a dynamic and purposive character: his very repose is the result of stress. He is a pilgrim that still seeks his country. Urged by his innate tendency to transcendence, he is on his way to higher levels, more sublime fulfillments, greater self-giving acts. Though he may have forsaken all superficial activity, deep, urgent action still remains. "The possession of God," says Ruysbroeck, "demands and supposes active love. He who thinks or feels otherwise is deceived. All our life as it is in God is immersed in blessedness: all our life as it is in ourselves is immersed in active love. And though we live wholly in ourselves and wholly in God, it is but one life; but it is twofold and opposite according to our feeling—rich and poor, hungry and fulfilled, active and quiet."

—*Mysticism*, 317-25

## PREPARATION FOR A RETREAT

A great many of us are here tonight for the first time so I hope those who have been often before will bear it if we think a little about what a Retreat ought to be. It is a period in which we withdraw from the restless surface of life in order to give our whole attention to the deeps of life: cut off relations with our visible environment which generally obsesses us, in order to realize better, if we can, our invisible environment—GOD—and adjust ourselves better to Him, His demands, His gifts. The silence is there, of course, to help that adjustment by cutting off one of the most obvious of all distractions. "Blessed," said Thomas à Kempis, "be the ears that heed not

outward speech but hear the whisper of God." For this above all else we make a Retreat whatever else we put into it and whatever form it takes—to hear the whisper and see the light that comes to us from beyond the world and shows us how to live. We all wish to be taught how to live, don't we? and to go on being taught how to live, and the longer we go on with life, the more mysterious it seems to us and the more deeply we feel that need. . . .

So we have added something else to the object of our Retreat: it is a time when we can listen to the secret whisper of the Spirit and look at Christ again, for the contemplation of Christ is the first part of Christianity. One will help the other, enrich the other. The doctrine of the Trinity means that many-sided revelation of God and expression of God. . . .

Contemplation of Christ does not mean an emotional sort of pious daydream; it means entering by a deliberate, self-oblivious and humble attention into the tremendous mysterious of His Life—mysteries which each give us some deep truth about the Life and Will of God and the power and vocation of a soul that is given to God—mysteries which each one of us in particular is called to make part of our very lives. They will break up, into colours we can deal with, that white light of God's Holiness at which we cannot look.

You know sometimes how one goes to see a church which one is told has magnificent windows—and seen from outside they all look alike—dull, thick, grubby. We probably say, "Well! it is obvious there is good glass here but we cannot realize it." Then we open the door and go inside—leave the outer world, enter the inner world—and the universal light floods through the windows and bathes us in their colour and beauty and significance, shows us things of which we had never dreamed, a loveliness that lies beyond the fringe of speech. And so in the same way we cannot realize God and all our Lord's lovely meaning as a revelation of God and His eternal Truth and Beauty, from outside. One constantly hears people commenting on Christianity from outside and missing the point every time. They are on the wrong side of the wall. How important then it is for us to be familiar with the inner vision. . . . To re-enter that Cathedral, receive a fresh gift from its inexhaustible beauty, see through those windows more and more of the light of God, that is the secret of meditation. . . .

Now I want our Retreat to be like that: to dwell in the silence, and let the light from the windows penetrate, purify and quicken our souls, enhance our sense of truth and beauty, our self-abandoning love. . . .

You know how Plato spoke of this life as a cave in which men were imprisoned and could only judge reality by seeing the shadow cast by light outside. But for Christians the cave has become a great shrine in which we are taught and moulded for the purpose of our creation—a sacrificial life in union with God. We come here to recapture that vision; to open up our unsatisfactory little souls to the light that pours in through the windows of His holiness. One glance round this evening is quite enough to fill us with that loving penitence for the past and that generous courage for the future which are the best of all dispositions for entering a Retreat. And tomorrow like pilgrims we will go round and make a stand before some of those windows and in their light try to see what we are and what we ought to do. We will take it all very quietly and humbly, try to leave our arguing, critical selves behind. Christianity is not an argument and Christianity is not given us in the form of logic but in the form of beauty and love. We must be receptive, humble and quiet. We must not hunt for imperfections in the windows, for the imperfections may be in our own eyes. If an artist shows you a picture, a musician plays you a Bach prelude, or a man introduces you to his beloved wife, and you fail to perceive their beauty, none of them will argue with you about what you have missed. They would never open your soul that way. And Christianity for the Christian is the perfect picture, the perfect prelude, the perfect bride, only visible to the eyes of humility and love. . . .

Now I think we shall find in our pilgrimage round the Cathedral, as we make a stand before some great aspect of Christ's life and it reveals to us bit by bit the thought of God for man, that there are three things for us to do.

First, looking quietly at the window, bathing in the lovely light that comes through it and which truly gives us God, we shall receive illumination, teaching and healing, a revelation of truth, by absorbing rather than by analysing. The very Light of the Eternal comes to our soul through that vivid Life, showing us the human transfigured by the Divine. . . .

That simple contemplation of Christ is a very important part of the life of prayer and our New Testament reading ought to nourish it.

Second (but remember it is second!), we must turn round and apply what we have seen and absorbed to our own inner life which has got to grow up to the fulness of His stature: to put on Christ. He is disclosed both as Saviour and Pattern, especially to those called to the service of Christ. In our daily work and routine, in our religious practice, in our intellectual life with its struggles, tensions, problems

and enlightenments; in all these Christ, the Word and Thought of God, is teaching, mending, vivifying us and calling us more and more insistently to love and sacrifice as the only path to union with Him.

In this quiet place, with the windows of His mystery all round us, how do we feel about that? Penitence comes in here for most of us. It is not our own little defects that make us feel most ashamed; it is the vision of Christ. The more enrapt and deliberate our contemplation of the window, the more our little pretensions to Christianity shrink. *There* is God's pattern for humanity and *here* am I. Lord, I am carnal, sold under sin. Nevertheless I come here. I am a bit of your raw material, nothing more. I am to submit and re-submit to your teaching, healing, transfiguring action in order that I may be more useful to your other children. . . .

Third, but that is not enough. A Christian does not stand alone. As well as the solitude of my soul before God, there is the responsibility of my soul to my fellow-men. As a member of the Mystical Body of Christ, a unit of the Church, I must in some way show these states and characteristics of Christ in my life, some more, some less, according to my special call. I am part of the organism through which Christ continues to live in the world. I too am required to incarnate something of His all-generous and redeeming spirit, share my knowledge of Him, give myself without stint to heal and save other children of God at my own cost. How does my life stand *that* test? . . .

I remember once in the Alps finding myself alone in a high pasture surrounded by the strange almost unearthly mountain life. I was filled then with that absolute contentment and solemn happiness which hardly anything else can give to those who have the mountain sense. Above me I could only see the next bit of rough path, but on the other side of the valley I gazed at a great majestic range of snowy peaks and knew they were an earnest of what was above me—waiting for me too if only I would slog on, take a few risks—the hidden reason of the climb with all its hard work. I stood there, getting smaller and smaller and happier and happier as I realized my own place in that great world of beauty and wonder.

Now I think a Retreat should be rather like that: a pause when we can look across the valley and see the great spiritual snowfields in their beauty—Christ and the achievement of the Saints. And although there may seem nothing round us at the moment but shale and rock and scrubby mountain-grass, still we have started and our object, though hidden, is the same.

—*Light of Christ*, 25-34

## THE NEED OF RETREAT

A first retreatant lately told me that when she confessed to her husband what she intended to do, he took his pipe from his mouth and said earnestly: "Go, my dear. Go, by all means! You're just about due for a spot of re-birth." That man, it seems to me, had a very clear idea of one function of a retreat: its power of causing the re-birth of our spiritual sense, quickening that which has grown dull and dead in us, calling it out into light and air, giving it another chance.

Most of us are bitterly conscious of the extent in which we are at the mercy of our surroundings: which grow ever more and more insistent in their pressure, their demands on our attention and time; less and less suggestive of a reality, of God. They call out and keep out the least spiritual side of our nature: and almost insensibly, often with the very best intentions, and under plea of good works, family duties, social obligations, we capitulate to the surface activities of existence, the ceaseless chain of passing events. We forget that awe-struck upward glance which is the mark of the spiritual man. Then we lose all sense of proportion; become fussy, restless, full of things that simply must be done, quite oblivious of the only reason why anything should be done. Our prayers become more and more like supernatural shopping lists, less and less like that conversation between one friend and another which is the ideal of Thomas à Kempis. We can't rest in the Lord; there really isn't time for that. Besides, there's the telephone, which may be trusted to ring at the most shattering moment. So we gradually forget what interior silence is like, and seldom enter the interior world: and the result of this is appreciated only too well by all those with whom we have to deal. When we have reached this stage, nothing is going to save us but that Spot of Re-birth. . . .

That might be called the clinical reason for retreats. Now take another reason. Our so-called civilization gets more and more complicated, more and more noisy. It is like one of those mills where the noise of the looms makes it impossible for the workers to hear each other speak. And if we go on at it long enough without a break we begin to think the looms are all that matter, and we are merely there to keep them going and must not bother about anything else. In other words, I am sure there is a real danger that Christian spirituality in its deepest and loveliest reaches will be killed out by the pressure and demands of the social machine, and even of the ecclesi-



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astical machine. Man will get ever more utilitarian and this-world, and will wholly forget his true relation to God. . . .

And finally, what is to be the real objective—the aim—which we who believe in the retreat movement set before ourselves? We have said that it shall not be merely practical or merely remedial. It must include and look beyond both those aims. The object is the same as the object of the Christian life—sanctity—the production, fostering and maintenance of holiness. To sanctify, as Von Hügel was fond of saying, is the biggest thing out. Now souls are sanctified by the pressure and cleansing action of the Spirit, acting through and in the events of everyday life. But in order that the action of the Spirit may produce this effect, we know that a particular disposition, outlook, temper, is also required in the soul. And how is that to be produced? Perhaps most easily and directly by taking the soul from its normal preoccupations and placing it in an atmosphere and condition in which, with the minimum of distraction, it can attend to and realize God. And this in essence is a retreat.

—*Light of Christ*, 102-6

## REGARDING MEDITATION

January 16, 1908

Now about meditation. . . .

Try this way.

1. Put yourself into some position so easy and natural to you that you don't *notice* your body: and shut your eyes.

2. Represent to your mind, some phrase, truth, dogma, event—e.g. a phrase of the Paternoster or *Anima Christi*, the Passion, the Nativity are the sort of things I use. Something that occurs naturally. Now, don't think about it, but keep it before you, turning it over as it were, as you might finger some precious possession.

3. Deliberately, and by an act of will, shut yourself off from your senses. Don't attend to touch or hearing: till the external world seems unreal and far away. Still holding on to your idea, turn your attention *inwards* (this is what Ruysbroeck means by introversion) and allow yourself to sink, as it were, downwards and downwards, into the profound silence and peace which is the essence of the meditative state. More you cannot do for yourself: if you get further, you will

do so automatically as a consequence of the above practice. It is the "shutting off of the senses" and what Boehme calls the "stopping the wheel of the imagination and ceasing from self-thinking" that is hard at first. Anyhow, do not try these things when you are tired—it is useless: and do not give up the form of prayer that comes naturally to you: and do not be disheartened if it seems at first a barren and profitless performance. It is quite possible to obtain spiritual nourishment without being consciously aware of it!

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 73

THE ROOTS and the FRUITS of PRAYER

***PART FOUR***

## WHAT IS THE SPIRITUAL LIFE?

"The spiritual life" is a dangerously ambiguous term; indeed, it would be interesting to know what meaning any one reader at the present moment is giving to these three words. Many, I am afraid, would really be found to mean "the life of my own inside": and a further section, to mean something very holy, difficult and peculiar—a sort of honours course in personal religion—to which they did not intend to aspire.

Both these kinds of individualist—the people who think of the spiritual life as something which is for themselves and about themselves, and the people who regard it as something which is not for themselves—seem to need a larger horizon, within which these interesting personal facts can be placed; and seen in rather truer proportion. Any spiritual view which focuses attention on ourselves, and puts the human creature with its small ideas and adventures in the centre foreground is dangerous till we recognise its absurdity. . . .

Christians, of course, acknowledge that Will and that Kingdom as the greatest of all realities every time they say the Lord's Prayer; that is, if they really grasp its tremendous implications, and really mean what they say. But so many Christians are like deaf people at a concert. They study the programme carefully, believe every statement made in it, speak respectfully of the quality of the music, but only really hear a phrase now and again. So they have no notion at all of the mighty symphony which fills the universe, to which our lives are destined to make their tiny contribution, and which is the self-expression of the Eternal God.

Yet there are plenty of things in our normal experience, which imply the existence of that world, that music, that life. . . . No one who studies with sympathy, for instance, the history of religious revivals, can doubt that here, often in a grotesque and unlovely disguise, a force from beyond the world really breaks in upon the temporal order with disconcerted power.

So, too, all who are sensitive to beauty know the almost agonising sense of revelation its sudden impact brings—the abrupt disclosure of the mountain summit, the wild cherry-tree in blossom, the crowning moment of a great concerto, witnessing to another beauty beyond sense. And again, any mature person looking back on their own past life, will be forced to recognise factors in that life, which cannot be

attributed to heredity, environment, opportunity, personal initiative or mere chance. The contact which proved decisive, the path unexpectedly opened, the other path closed, the thing we felt compelled to say, the letter we felt compelled to write. It is as if a hidden directive power, personal, living, free, were working through circumstances and often against our intention or desire; pressing us in a certain direction, and moulding us to a certain design. . . .

When we consider our situation like that, when we lift our eyes from the crowded by-pass to the eternal hills; then, how much the personal and practical things we have to deal with are enriched. What meaning and coherence come into our scattered lives. We mostly spend those lives conjugating three verbs: to Want, to Have, and to Do. Craving, clutching, and fussing, on the material, political, social, emotional, intellectual—even on the religious—plane, we are kept in perpetual unrest: forgetting that none of these verbs have any ultimate significance, except so far as they are transcended by and included in, the fundamental verb, to Be: and that Being, not wanting, having and doing, is the essence of a spiritual life. But now, with this widening of the horizon, our personal ups and downs, desires, cravings, efforts, are seen in scale; as small and transitory spiritual facts, within a vast, abiding spiritual world, and lit by a steady spiritual light. And at once a new coherence comes into our existence, a new tranquillity and release. Like a chalet in the Alps, that homely existence gains atmosphere, dignity, significance from the greatness of the sky above it and the background of the everlasting hills. . . .

This, of course, is what religion is about; this adherence to God, this confident dependence on that which is unchanging. This is the more abundant life, which in its own particular language and own particular way, it calls us to live. . . .

It means, when we come down again to our own particular case, that my spiritual life is not something specialised and intense; a fenced-off devotional patch rather difficult to cultivate, and needing to be sheltered from the cold winds of the outer world. Nor is it an alternative to my outward, practical life. On the contrary, it is the very source of that quality and purpose which makes my practical life worth while. . . .

Still less does the spiritual life mean a mere cultivation of one's own soul; poking about our interior premises with an electric torch. Even though in its earlier stages it may, and generally does, involve dealing with ourselves, and that in a drastic way, and therefore requires personal effort and personal choice, it is also intensely social;

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for it is a life that is shared with all other spirits, whether in the body or out of the body, to adopt St. Paul's words. You remember how Dante says that directly a soul ceases to say Mine, and says Ours, it makes the transition from the narrow, constricted, individual life to the truly free, truly personal, truly creative spiritual life; in which all are linked together in one single response to the Father of all spirits, God. Here, all interpenetrate, and all, however humble and obscure their lives may seem, can and do affect each other. Every advance made by one is made for all.

Only when we recognize all this and act on it, are we fully alive and taking our proper place in the universe of spirits; for life means the fullest possible give and take between the living creature and its environment: breathing, feeding, growing, changing. And spiritual life, which is profoundly organic, means the give and take, the willed correspondence of the little human spirit with the Infinite Spirit, here where it is; its feeding upon Him, its growth towards perfect union with Him, its response to His attraction and subtle pressure. . . .

There are countless ways in which this may happen: sometimes under conditions which seem to the world like the very frustration of life, of progress, of growth. Thus boundless initiative is chained to a sick bed and transmitted into sacrifice; the lover of beauty is sent to serve in the slum, the lover of stillness is kept on the run all day, the sudden demand to leave all comes to the one who least expects it, and through and in these apparent frustrations the life of the spirit emerges and grows. So those who imagine that they are called to contemplation because they are attracted by contemplation, when the common duties of existence steadily block this path, do well to realise that our own feelings and preferences are very poor guides when it comes to the robust realities and stern demands of the Spirit.

St. Paul did not want to be an apostle to the Gentiles. He wanted to be a clever and appreciated young Jewish scholar, and kicked against the pricks. St. Ambrose and St. Augustine did not want to be over-worked and worried bishops. Nothing was farther from their intention. St. Cuthbert wanted the solitude and freedom of his hermitage on the Farne; but he did not often get there. St. Francis Xavier's preference was for an ordered life close to his beloved master, St. Ignatius. At a few hours' notice he was sent out to be the Apostle of the Indies and never returned to Europe again. Henry Martyn, the fragile and exquisite scholar, was compelled to sacrifice the intellectual life to which he was so perfectly fitted for the missionary life to which he felt he was decisively called. In all these, a power beyond

themselves decided the direction of life. Yet in all we recognise not frustration, but the highest of all types of achievement. Things like this—and they are constantly happening—gradually convince us that the over-ruling reality of life is the Will and Choice of a Spirit acting not in a mechanical but in a living and personal way; and that the spiritual life of man does not consist in mere individual betterment, or assiduous attention to his own soul, but in a free and unconditional response to that Spirit's pressure and call, whatever the cost may be.

The first question here, then, is not "What is best for my soul?" nor is it even "What is most useful to humanity?" But—transcending both these limited aims—what function must this life fulfil in the great and secret economy of God? How directly and fully that principle admits us into the glorious liberty of the children of God; where we move with such ease and suppleness, because the whole is greater than any of its parts and in that whole we have forgotten ourselves.

Indeed, if God is All and His Word to us is All, that must mean that He is the reality and controlling factor of every situation, religious or secular; and that it is only for His glory and creative purpose that it exists. Therefore our favourite distinction between the spiritual life and the practical life is false. We cannot divide them. One affects the other all the time: for we are creatures of sense and of spirit, and must live an amphibious life. Christ's whole Ministry was an exhibition, first in one way and then in another, of this mysterious truth. It is through all the circumstances of existence, inward and outward, not only those which we like to label spiritual, that we are pressed to our right position and given our supernatural food. For a spiritual life is simply a life in which all that we do comes from the centre, where we are anchored in God: a life soaked through and through by a sense of His reality and claim, and self-given to the great movement of His will.

—*The Spiritual Life*, 15-36

## SPIRITUAL LIFE

"Spiritual Life" is a very elastic phrase; which can either be made to mean the most hazy religiosity and most objectionable forms of uplift, or be limited to the most exclusive types of contemplation. . . . If we know much about ourselves, I think we must agree that there

is something in us which, in spite of all the efforts of a materialistic psychology, is not accounted for either by the requirements of natural life or those of social life; and which cannot altogether be brought within the boundaries of the intellectual and rational life. Though as it develops this "something" will penetrate and deeply affect all these levels of our existence, we recognize that it is distinct from them. It is an element which is perhaps usually dormant; yet is sometimes able to give us strange joys, and sometimes strange discomforts. It points beyond our visible environment to something else; to a Reality which transcends the time-series, and yet to which we, because of the existence of this quality in us, are somehow akin.

By talking of "spirit" or "spiritual life"—terms more allusive than exact—we do not make these facts less mysterious. But we do make it possible to think about them, and consider what they must involve for our view of the nature of Reality; what light they cast on the nature of man; and finally how this quality which we call "spiritual life" calls us, as spirits, to act. In other words, we are brought up against the three primary data of religion: God, the soul, and the relation between God and the soul. Those three points, I think, cover the main aspects of man's life as spirit. They become, as he grows in spiritual awareness and responsiveness, more and more actual to him, and more and more fully incorporated in his experience. And they are all three represented in the life of prayer; which, taken in the widest sense, is the peculiar spiritual activity of man. . . .

We begin then with this fact of something in us which points beyond physical life, however complete that physical life may be, and suggests—perhaps in most of us, very faintly and occasionally, but in some with a decisive authority—that somehow we are borderland creatures. As human beings, we stand between an order of things which we know very well, to which most of us are more or less adapted, and in which we can easily immerse ourselves; and another order, of which we do not know much, but which, if we respond to it and develop a certain suppleness in respect of it, can gradually become the most important factor in our lives. . . .

So I suppose, from the human point of view, a spiritual life is a life which is controlled by a gradually developing sense of the Eternal, of God and His transcendent reality; an increasing capacity for Him, so that our relation to God becomes the chief thing about us, exceeding and also conditioning our relationship with each other. So here the first and second points which we were to consider—what we mean by a spiritual life, and what a spiritual life involves for us—seem



to melt into one other. Indeed, it is almost impossible to consider them separately. . . .

When we come to make the personal application of these ideas, this view of the relation of our fluid, half-made personalities to God, and ask how, as individuals, we are called to act—and that is the third of the questions with which we started—we see that just in so far as this view of human life is realistic, it lays on each of us a great and a distinct obligation. Though the life of the Spirit comes from God, the ocean of our being, *we* have to do something about it. Utter dependence on God must be balanced by courageous initiative. Each of us has a double relationship, and is required to develop a double correspondence. First, with the Divine Creative Spirit who penetrates and supports our spirits; and secondly, with the universe of souls, which is enlaced with us in one vast web of being—whether our immediate neighbours of the Christian family who form with us part of the Mystical Body of Christ, or the more widespread corporation of all the children of God, of which this perhaps forms the nucleus. . . .

Devotion by itself has little value, may even by itself be a form of self-indulgence, unless it issues in some costly and self-giving action of this kind. The spiritual life of any individual, therefore, has to be extended both vertically to God and horizontally to other souls; and the more it grows in both directions, the less merely individual and therefore the more truly personal it will be. It is, in the truest sense, in humanity that we grow by this incorporation of the spiritual and temporal, the deeps and the surface of life; getting more not less rich, various and supple in our living out of existence. Seen from the spiritual angle, Christian selves are simply parts of that vast organism the Church Invisible, which is called upon to incarnate the Divine Life in history, and bring eternity into time. . . .

I need not point out that for Christians the Incarnation—the entrance of God into History—and its extension in the Church bring together these two movements in the soul and in the human complex; and start a vast process, to which every awakened soul which rises above self-interest has some contribution to make. As we become spiritually sensitive, and more alert in our response to experience, I think we sometimes get a glimpse of that deep creative action by which we are being brought into this new order of being, more and more transformed into the agents of spirit; able to play our part in the great human undertaking of bringing the whole world nearer to the intention of God.

—*Mixed Pastures*, 44-53

## LIFE AS PRAYER

What, then, is Prayer? In a most general sense, it is the intercourse of our little human souls with God. Therefore it includes all the work done by God Himself through, in, and with the souls which are self-given to Him in prayer. God is Spirit; we, His children, are little spiritual creatures. He is not far from each one of us. His life indwells each person in this room; and the communion of our separate lives with that frontal love and life is prayer. Prayer, then, is a purely spiritual activity; and its real doer is God Himself, the one inciter and mover of our souls.

So, how are we to begin to think about this mysterious, and yet very practical, work of prayer which we are all trying in some way or degree to do? The first step, I suppose, is to try to reach a new and more vivid realization of the Holy Spirit of God—"God Himself as He is everywhere and in all things," as St. Thomas Aquinas says—ceaselessly at work upon our small and half-grown spirits; creating, illuminating, restoring and spiritualizing us. Now, God's creative and transforming action does not seem to work as something separate from the souls of men and women, but in and through those souls of men and women. "We are not," said Baron von Hügel, "to think of Spirit and spirit, God and the soul, as two separate entities. His Spirit works in closest association with ours."

A real man or woman of prayer, then, should be a live wire, a link between God's grace and the world that needs it. In so far as you have given your lives to God, you have offered yourselves, without conditions, as transmitters of His saving and enabling love: and the will and love, the emotional drive, which you thus consecrate to God's purposes, can do actual work on supernatural levels for those for whom you are called upon to pray. One human spirit can, by its prayer and love, touch and change another human spirit; it can take a soul and lift it into the atmosphere of God. This happens, and the fact that it happens is one of the most wonderful things in the Christian life. All your prayers, and far more than that, all your generous and loving desires, trials, sufferings, fatigues and renunciations—and of course there is no real life of prayer without all these—can avail for those persons and causes you seek to help. To all of them you are, or should be, agents or transmitters of the transforming, redeeming power of God; and the most real work you ever do should be that which you do secretly and alone. . . .

Each time you take a human soul with you into your prayer, you accept from God a piece of spiritual work with all its implications and with all its cost—a cost which may mean for you spiritual exhaustion and darkness, and may even include vicarious suffering, the Cross. In offering yourselves on such levels of prayer for the sake of others, you are offering to take your part in the mysterious activities of the spiritual world; to share the saving work of Christ. Each soul thus given to your care brings a need which it is your job to meet, and an opportunity which will never be repeated, a duty that no one else can fulfil. . . .

I am sure it was because the saints were so utterly uncalculating in their self-giving, cared for souls in such a divine way, and with such unmeasured love and eager acceptance of suffering, minded about people so much, that they did their great redeeming works of prayer. They show us that real intercession is not merely a petition but a piece of work, involving perfect, costly self-surrender to God for the work He wants done on other souls. Such great self-giving and great results may be their special privilege; still, they are showing us on a grand scale something which each cell of the Body of Christ has got to try to do on a small scale. They prove to us how closely and really all human spirits are connected—what we can do for one another if we only love enough—and how far-reaching is the power and responsibility of every Christian soul. We can only understand their experience by realizing that we are truly parts of a great spiritual organism. The Mystical Body of Christ is not an image, but a fact. We perpetually give and take from each other the indwelling Divine Life, and by our prayers, thoughts and actions affect all within our radius.

—*Collected Papers*, 61-67

## THE DEGREES OF PRAYER

I propose now to make five divisions: and these are—Vocal Prayer, Meditation, the Prayer of Immediate Acts, the Prayer of Simplicity, the Prayer of Quiet. Beyond these are the higher degrees of contemplation, which are outside our present scope.

First, then, comes Vocal Prayer. We all know what this is; but we do not always remember, in our eagerness for something more spiritual, that apart from its devotional aspect its educative value for the

soul that uses it is greater than is sometimes supposed. In vocal prayer we speak, not only to God, but also to ourselves. We are filling our minds with acts of love, praise, humility and penitence, which will serve us well in times when the power of mental prayer seems to fail us and the use of these formulas becomes the only way of turning to God left within our reach. Moreover, psychology insists that the spoken word has more suggestive power, is more likely to reach and modify our deeper psychic levels, than any inarticulate thought; for the centres of speech are closely connected with the heart of our mental life. Therefore those who value the articulate recitation of a daily office, the use of litanies and psalms, are keeping closer to the facts of existence than those who only talk generally of remaining in a state of prayer. . . .

As the life of prayer begins to exert its full power, such vocal prayers will gradually but steadily become slower and more pondered. The soul finds in their phrases more and more significance, makes of these phrases special applications, and is led on by them to petitions and aspirations of its own. This means that it is drawing near to the next stage, that of meditation. This is the first degree of mental prayer; that is to say, prayer in which we do not repeat set forms, but do something on our own account. Meditation is a word which covers a considerable range of devotional states. It is perhaps most simply defined as thinking in the Presence of God. And since our ordinary thoughts are scattered, seldom poised for long on one point, but evoked and influenced by a multitude of external things, real meditation requires as its preliminary what ascetic writers call recollection—a deliberate gathering of ourselves together, a retreat into our own souls. This is more easily done by a simple exercise of the imagination, a gentle turning to God, than by those ferocious efforts towards concentrating which some manuals advise, and which often end by concentrating attention on the concentration itself. I will not go further into their technical descriptions of method; which seem so difficult when we read them, and often worry people needlessly. There is no virtue in any one method, except in so far as it succeeds; and different methods succeed with different souls. For some, the slow reading of a passage in the Bible or the *Imitation* leads directly to a state of prayer: for others, a quiet dwelling on one of God's attributes is a gateway to adoration. Articulate speech is now left aside, but the ceaseless stream of inward discourse may persist, and become a secret conversation with God; while others will be led to consideration, a quiet ruminating on spiritual things. As to Three Point Meditations

and so on, it is perhaps enough if we keep in mind that every real meditation, however short, natural and artless, does involve three points: for our mind, will and feelings are all exercised in it. We think in some way of the subject of our meditation. We feel the emotion, whether of love, penitence or joy, which it suggests to us. And finally, the aim of all meditative prayer is a resolution, or a renewal of our surrender to God: and this is an act of the will. . . .

The transition from meditation to immediate acts takes place only in those souls which have some tendency to contemplation; not perhaps much, but still an aptitude seeking expression. By them it is commonly felt as a decreasing inclination to reason or discourse in prayer, and an increasing inclination to simple, spontaneous expressions of love and penitence. It is true that the praying self does think; but not with the same method and completeness as before. It now dwells more and more on the affections; on acts of love and adoration, meek aspirations to God, expressed in short phrases which may seem banal enough when we read them in books of devotion, but become charged, for the soul in this degree, with the most intense significance. . . . Gradually one act of will, affection or aspiration comes more and more to dominate the whole prayer, say of half an hour's duration or more: and is used merely to true up that state of attention which is the very heart of prayer. When this condition is established, the soul has reached the degree which is sometimes called the prayer of simplicity, and sometimes that of repose, simple attention or active contemplation. It is thrown open with great love and desire to God, but in so simple a way that it cannot analyse its own experience. Its whole impulse is to wait on Him rather than to speak to Him. . . .

We often confuse ourselves by speaking and thinking of contemplation as a "state." It is not a state in the sense of being static, a continuous unchanging condition. In all those degrees of prayer which we are considering a constant variety of acts is normal, wholesome and inevitable. Though a rapt attention to God dominate the prayer, within this attention must fluctuate, thoughts and acts must arise from time to time. To say this is only to say that our mental life persists in it. Now when these thoughts and acts, these ripples on the deep pool of contemplation, are born of that profound feeling of charity and compassion which cannot long remain untouched by our neighbours' needs and griefs, then surely intercession of the very best kind is exercised by us. For intercession is a special and deliberate way of exercising love, in completest union with the Love of God. And to be in perfect charity with all men is already to intercede for

them; to put, as it were, our spiritual weight on their side of the scale.

These four degrees of prayer—that is, ordinary vocal prayer, mental prayer or meditation, immediate acts, and simplicity—are to a great extent within the self's control. In theological language they are natural and not supernatural degrees. Once they are thoroughly established, the soul can normally and under suitable conditions produce them. But with the real Prayer of Quiet, we pass beyond this condition. It is wholly involuntary. None can produce it of themselves; and it seems always to come as a distinct and irresistible experience from without. In technical terms, it is "infused" or the work of grace. In this real quiet, which may come suddenly upon the soul in the course of its ordinary prayer, it is not merely drawn towards a simple and imageless attention to God and aspiration towards Him. It is more or less intensely aware of His Presence. Here, in fact, we have the first faint emergence of the mystical consciousness, in stillness and humility receiving the obscure impression of the Divine. In the prayer of simplicity and aspiration, the deeps of the unconscious are opened up to God; and that this is veritably done in these degrees is proved by their effect on the impulsive sources of conduct. But in the quiet, and the simple union which is the full development of quiet, this apprehension overflows into consciousness; and this is something which the self cannot effect by the exercise of will. All great writers on prayer insist on this point.

Sometimes the establishment of this new degree comes by way of a painful inward struggle and aridity; what St. John of the Cross has described as "the night of the senses"—a period of distress and obscurity, in which it seems to the soul that it is losing all it had gained of the life of prayer. This is more especially felt by people who have real contemplative aptitude, and whom this type of spirituality is destined in the end to dominate. It meets and must conquer many resistances in their active minds, must cut for itself new paths; and this may involve tension and suffering and the apparent withdrawal of the ordinary power of prayer. Here is a point at which skilled and sympathetic guidance is of special service to the soul, which is often bewildered and disheartened by its own experience, its strange sense of dimness and incapacity. Others, whose natural level is, and may always remain, the prayer of aspiration or of simplicity, may find themselves plunged in the quiet from time to time; and will obtain from this experience a refreshment, power and absolute certitude which the other degrees of prayer cannot give.

—*Collected Papers*, 47-57

## THE LEVELS OF PRAYER

All real prayer can be brought under the three heads of adoration of God, communion with God, co-operation with God; and of these adoration, worship, the lifting up of heart and mind to the Eternal, should always be taught first. Many people say that this is difficult, that in practice petition comes more naturally and is easier to explain. But if we begin with self-interest, or even with our neighbours' or the world's interests, we may never get any further. "Lift up your hearts" is the formula for Christian prayer. It seeks first the Kingdom of God; and we ought to keep that truth in the foreground. We can show what adoration is, by the direct method; by the use of the great adoring prayers of Christianity, such as the *Gloria* and the *Sanctus*, or by simple acts of faith, hope and charity, which are charged with the spirit of worship and love, and so are able to evoke that spirit in those who use them. That which we do in prayer has its subjective effect and importance. It speaks to God, and speaks to our own souls too; and the acts of adoration and trust in which the priest makes his people join, will tend far more effectually than any exhortation or description to open their souls to the supernatural and produce in them adoration and trust. No instruction on prayer should ever end without the practising together of the kind of prayer which has been taught.

As regards the teaching of intercession, it is surely of the first importance that this great spiritual act should be made real to those who do it; avoiding in the first instance large, vague petitions and world causes, and beginning with the most homely and immediate interests and needs. Until people have learned to love their neighbours, fellow workers, village or town, and hold these and their needs up to God, it is useless and unreal to encourage them to launch into the great intercessory efforts which are needed if they are really, and not formally, to hold up to God in love the needs of the world.

Further, we should surely insist more than we commonly do on the close connection between prayer and sacrifice; and plainly denounce that too common type of prayer which asks for results to which those who pray are not prepared to make any real contribution. It is not easy to justify at the bar of reality the prayers for peace and for reunion which are now offered in countless churches, and by numerous individuals who are not in fact prepared to do one difficult thing, or to make a single sacrifice either of possessions or of prej-

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udices, in the interests of peace or of reunion. Peace is very costly, and reunion will be very costly. Both will need great renunciation; a great acceptance of the Cross. To tell people to pray for either is unreal, unless we also tell them such prayer carries its own sacrificial obligation; and those who offer it must be prepared to take their share of effort, and pay their share of the cost. So, too, with other more immediate interests—unemployment, industrial problems, missions—about which Church people are encouraged to put up frequent petitions, but often do not exert themselves much. Our teaching on prayer would gain immensely in reality and power, and be taken more seriously by many who now ignore it, did we emphasize the intimate connection between prayer and our action outside prayer, and the unworthiness of mere cadging demands that God will do things which really lie within our own responsibility.

—*Collected Papers*, 176-78

## THE SPAN OF PRAYER

Within the living experience of the soul it is impossible to separate the spheres of purification and of prayer; for this breaks up the solidarity of that Godward life of man, which is at the same time an ever-renewed movement of abandonment, an intercourse, and a transformation. The life of prayer, in its widest and deepest sense, is our total life towards and in God; and therefore the most searching of all the purifying influences at work in us. It is the very expression of our spiritual status, a status at once so abject, and so august; the name of the mysterious intercourse of the created spirit with that Uncreated Spirit, in whom it has its being and on whom it depends. We are called, as the New Testament writers insist, to be "partakers of the Divine Nature": and this is a vocation which shames while it transforms. So prayer may be, and should be, both cleansing and quickening: by turns conversation and adoration, penitence and happiness, work and rest, submission and demand. It should have all the freedom and variety, the depth and breadth of life; for it is in fact the most fundamental expression of our life. And though it is and must be developed by means of a deliberate discipline, and through the humble practice of symbolic acts, these only have im-



portance because they set free the will from unreal objectives, and help our whole being to expand towards God.

In all its degrees, from the most naïve to the most transcendental, and in all its expressions—from the most simple and homely devotional acts, to that passive waiting on the Spirit, “idle in appearance, and yet so active,” which is called by Grou “the adoration most worthy of God”—the very heart of prayer is this opening up of human personality to the all-penetrating and all-purifying Divine activity. On one hand, we acknowledge our need and our dependence; on the other the certain presence of the supernatural world, the *Patria* ever in intimate contact with us, and our own possession of a seed, a supernatural spark, which knows that world and corresponds with it. Thus all progress in prayer, whatever its apparent form or achievements, consists in the development of this, its essential character. It must nourish and deepen our humility, confidence and love; and thus set up and maintain an ever more perfect commerce between the soul’s true being and that Being in Whom it lives and moves. This is why, in the concrete reality of the interior life, prayer and purification must always go hand in hand.

For this mysterious intercourse, so crudely and so casually practised by us, so little understood, places our souls—conditioned as they are by succession and contingency—at the disposal of that immanent Spirit of God which indwells and penetrates our life, and yet transcends succession and contingency. It is a movement out towards absolute action; man the ever-changing acknowledging the presence and reality of the Changeless, and adhering to It in trustful love. This communion with the Supernatural then, whether active or passive, interceding or adoring—for all these are the partial expressions of one rich and various correspondence—is the religious act, the religious state *par excellence*; the very substance of a spiritual life. . . . In meditation, says Surin, we go to God on foot; in the prayer of affection we go on horseback; in the prayer of simple recollection we sail in a good ship with a favouring wind. The essential thing is that we should undertake the journey; that the soul’s face should be set towards its home.

—*The Golden Sequence*, 147-50

## INTERCESSION: MAN'S UNION WITH GOD

August 12, 1940

After all, Intercession is *not* asking God to do difficult things for Mr. Jones or Mr. Smith (though as you say sometimes when we are deeply concerned we can't help doing this). It is offering your will and love that God may use them as channels whereby His Spirit of mercy, healing, power, or light, may reach them and achieve His purposes in them. We can't do it unless we care, both for God's will and also for "the whole family of man"—but that certainly does not involve knowing all the details about everyone who asks our prayers. God knows the details—we need not. Probably the best kind of intercession is a quite general offering of oneself in union with our Lord—and that is what the total prayer of the Church for the world is. He prays in and through us, lifting up into the supernatural world all souls and causes and setting them before God's face—and it is our privilege to share that "lifting-up" process. Of course there is and must be a wide variety in the way people pray. For some, "crude petition" about Tommy's exam. or Aunt Jane's bronchitis is the only sort that is real. We each do what we can, mostly very badly. The point is that we do it with faith and love and offer it to God, who will take from it that act of will and love which alone really matters, and use it where and how He chooses. Perhaps the prayer we make here may find its fulfilment the other side of the world. Perhaps the help we were given in a difficult moment came from a praying soul we never knew! It is all a deep mystery and we should be careful not to lay down hard and fast rules. The variousness with which Grace works is one of the most wonderful things about it. It is a living and personal energy, not a machine, and makes a response of love to all our movements of love—even the most babyish. But our power of interceding for those quite unknown to us is very closely connected with our membership of the Church—it is her total prayer in which we take part. As individualists we could not do it with any sense of reality. I think we have to try to keep two sorts of Intercession going—this share in the Church's prayer and also our personal self-offering for persons or causes about which we care deeply—the corporate and individual sides of full religion.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 292-93

## A PRAYER POLICY

February 7, 1931

Now about your letter. You are not required to have a "prayer policy." Do you have a policy about intercourse with your friends or any other of the deepest relations of life? Your "policy" must simply be to respond to what God gives and do your best, as you can, in the circumstances. And don't be too proud to acknowledge that what He does is infinitely more important than what you can feel or do.

Resting quietly in the Divine Presence is a prayer and often a far better one than our deliberate efforts can manage: and more humbling, because we can't produce it at will. Our part, when it is like that, is very grateful acceptance. Please don't increase your Communion at present. I would rather you observed a very moderate rule and put obedience before spiritual experiences. When you feel your prayer is blank and poor and deficient in love, say how sorry you are. And when you are quite left dry, use formal prayers and try honestly to enter into them and mean them as your little contribution to the total prayer and praise of the Church!

The more you think of *that* and the less of your own condition the better!

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 194

## THE QUESTION OF KNEELING

April 12, 1910

You have my deepest sympathy in your uncertainties about that question of kneeling down under the eyes of one's companions when visiting churches! The same problem perennially haunts me: and like you, I usually end in a compromise! I certainly would not in any company pass an altar of the Blessed Sacrament without kneeling: but apart from this, I really think there is something to be said in favour of varying one's practice according to one's company. After all, the object of kneeling down is to pray—and it is not easy to do this under the amazed eyes of one's fellow-creatures! I think there is a legitimate reserve and shyness in religion which is not cowardice any more than refusing to kiss anyone you love in public would be

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cowardice. Also, many people would really be made horribly uncomfortable and embarrassed if you *did* kneel down when you went into a church with them; and I don't know why you should upset them like that. Personally I detest seeing churches with people! But when it has to be, of two evils I think it is better to sink one's individuality and go quietly round rather than make a disconcerting exhibition of piety. But I fear this solution will not appeal to you!

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 116-17

## THE ACT OF RECOLLECTION

July 25, 1911

As to making an act of recollection, I can only tell you what I do myself. I think I generally (1) make a definite act of the will to *attend* to it, (2) some short verbal prayer holding on tight to each word, (3) go on direct from that, or sometimes without finishing it to a sort of staring at God. Of course very often it does not come off at all; and when it does (3) may vary from a mere deliberate act of meditation to real passivity which is entirely outside our own control and should *never* be deliberately struggled for. If I were you, I should try to do this for 10 or 15 minutes every morning at first, not for longer whilst it is an effort. What is really best for you I believe when you are like this, is just to say, you will put aside that (or any other given point of time) for attending exclusively to God—and then spend it as seems natural when it comes, not in striving for states that do not come of themselves, but just being content to give yourself up to Him and “be as you are.”

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 127

## THE VALUE OF EUCHARISTIC LITURGY

In our religion, and in the worship which is the expression of our religion, we look out towards Eternity; and bit by bit, in various ways and degrees, we discover in ourselves a certain capacity for Eternity—and more than this, a deep thirst for the Unchanging, a need of

God. But because we have lost purity of heart, we cannot recognize the way in which that capacity can be filled, that thirst satisfied, that profound need of our nature met. Indeed, this self-opening of the creature to the Eternal, this breaking down of the barriers of self-love, is not an obvious nor an easy process: it makes demands upon the half-grown and half-awakened human spirit which, in its solitude, it can hardly meet. The soul is responding, it is true, to a call, a demand which comes from the very heart of Reality and speaks to something within itself which already has kinship with that Reality. But the call is not always easy to interpret; nor is the way to meet the demand very clear. Our minds are distracted, our desires are divided, our vision is clouded. Left to ourselves, beset by confusing circumstances and contradictory voices, we are seldom able to recognize the things that belong to our peace. And so it is that we need a pattern, a formula, which shall transcend and yet enfold all personal insights and cravings, linking our secret and still confused experience with the great drive of the race towards God: some great impersonal action, within which, losing ourselves as individuals, we find ourselves to be sharing a more abundant life.

Now the Christian has this pattern, this all-embracing formula, given to him in the Eucharistic Liturgy; which sums up and expresses the worshipping life of the Church. And it is because every aspect of that response which the whole created order makes to its Origin and Lord finds here its sanction and expression that the Liturgy has become the supreme ritual act of the Christian family, the devotional centre of the Church's Godward life; and a deepening sense of its significance one of the best ways to a fuller participation in that Godward life. Here, movement and words combine to produce an art form which is the vehicle of her self-offering to God and communion with God. She gives thanks, offers, adores and supplicates, breaks and distributes the Bread of Life: and, in this ordered sequence, declares her own essential nature and traces the graph of the soul's movement towards God. Thus it is that the thankful remembrance and presentation before Him of the one perfect sacrifice accomplished at one point of space and time in Christ, which is the heart of the Eucharistic action, has been expanded and enriched by the action of the Christian consciousness; till it has come to include and interpret all the loving and sacrificial responses of the creature to the Creator, the ever-repeated gift and consecration to the Eternal purpose of body and soul, and all that body and soul can achieve or bring. Here God the Supernatural seeks man by natural vehicles and lowly ways, and man,

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the creature of the borderland, makes his small response by the same means: and in those homely and sacred acts of fraction and communion by which the Church has continuously experienced the Presence of her Master, his total dependence on support and nourishment given him from the Eternal is declared and satisfied. The Bread of Angels is made the pilgrim's food, under the humble accidents of bread and wine; and thus man learns to recognize the constant mysterious intermingling, yet utter distinctness, of his natural and supernatural life. . . .

Thus the life of Christian devotion, whether secret or expressed, is not focussed upon the consolation, support or perfecting of the individual soul. It is true that all this can be achieved by it. But it looks beyond every personal satisfaction to a more sublime objective. The transfiguration of all life, the unifying of body and soul, matter and spirit, by its redemption from egotism and total consecration to the purposes of God, is the special call and destiny of man. He alone can recognize and respond to the demand of the Holy, and so lead creation out towards its goal; and this vocation, operating at many levels and in many ways, must give its special colour to Christian expressive worship, and gather up all human action and all human thought into one reasonable and living sacrifice. For the Eucharist points back to the supreme sacrament of the Incarnation, which discloses in visible and temporal terms the nature of the Eternal God; and thus declares the true significance of the Universe, as a means whereby the Transcendent Spirit is self-revealed to those spirits whom He has made for Himself. Here we are led out through the Gospel to that which is the occasion of the Gospel; the Nature of God and the nature of man. The all-sufficient and attractive, God, and the all-needy and desirous man; and man's first need of all—the need of God's touch on the soul, attracting and awakening him, and inciting him to generous love—met under homely tokens, and in humblest ways.

This it is which the Church in her liturgical drama presents again and again as the theme of her worship. When she celebrates the Eucharist she celebrates the mystery of her being, and that of each of her members; who must be conformed to the great rhythm of her sacrificial life. Indeed, from the human side the Eucharist is the representative action of the Communion of Saints: as from the Divine side it is the medium of that self-imparting of God which creates the Communion of Saints. Therefore it is not fanciful but true to say that the action of the Liturgy recapitulates the experience

of every Christian soul, showing forth visibly its invisible movement towards union with God; and that every soul, so far as it is given to this liturgic action, reproduces in its own experience the peculiar rhythm of Christian sacrifice. For the fully Christian life is a Eucharistic life: that is, a natural life conformed to the pattern of Jesus, given in its wholeness to God, laid on His altar as a sacrifice of love, and consecrated, transformed by His inpouring life, to be used to give life and food to other souls. It will be, according to its measure and special call, adoring, declaratory, intercessory and redemptive: but always a vehicle of the Supernatural. The creative spirit of God is a redemptive and cherishing love; and it is as friends and fellow workers with the Spirit, tools of the Divine redemptive action that Christians are required to live. "You are the Body of Christ," said St. Augustine to his communicants. That is to say, in you and through you the method and work of the Incarnation must go forward. You are meant to incarnate in your lives the theme of your adoration. You are to be taken, consecrated, broken and made means of grace; vehicles of the Eternal Charity.

—*The Mystery of Sacrifice*, ix-xvi

## THE GOAL OF PERSONAL WORSHIP

If by worship we mean the adoring response of the creature to the total demand of God, and the utmost contribution to His Glory which it is able to make—and Christians cannot mean less—it is obvious that so far as the individual is concerned, neither the spontaneous nor liturgical saying of "Lord! Lord!" nor the practising of an equivalent devotion in contemplative silence, fulfils its requirements. The single yet composite creature must make a single yet composite response; bringing to the altar all aspects of his nature, and not one alone. The dedicated will must bit by bit take up, transform, and unify the dedicated body and mind, welding them into a single instrument devoted to the purposes of God. This absorption and transformation of the visible and temporal is a true part of personal worship, since it is done for and towards God, and chiefly by means of the delicate and difficult oblation of each successive moment and act. Its aim is the furtherance of His Kingdom and doing of His Will, by the production of a life which shall be ever more and more an act of charity. So the

individual Christian is required to adore God, adhere to Him, and co-operate with Him in the sanctification of life—that is to say, the bringing of it into conformity with the Divine Perfection—and in the interests of this great purpose to give the colour of worship to every human action and desire whether overtly religious or not. . . .

“As a *whole* burnt offering He accepted them!” says the Book of Wisdom of the Friends of God. Christianity has always known this to be the crown of personal worship, and honoured its achievements in her saints; but has not always recognized the same august principle in action, in the life of every unit of the Body of Christ. Yet no other ideal of worship can in the long run meet the full demands of an incarnational faith. Indeed, the act of adoring self-abandonment which forms the heart of the “prayer of simplicity,” is only to be understood in the light of its completing opposite, the creative unity of the dedicated life: for the supposed contrast between action and contemplation is false. Contemplative action, a mixed life focussed upon the Reality of God and consistent at every point with the “Vision of the Principle,” is the true ideal of the Christian life of worship; the surrender of spirit to Spirit achieved in the depths of the soul overflowing into every faculty, and welding the whole personality into a single adoring response to the Eternal—sometimes by way of external action, and sometimes by way of interior sacrifice and prayer. This means in practice the surrender of personal interests, aims, and strivings to the one aim and interest of God; an ever deeper entrance into the stream of His self-giving life and more entire dependence on His pressure and incitement.

This drastic because love-impelled process of self-abandonment, often regarded by eager humanists as destructive of personality, is really in the highest degree creative. Indeed, it is the only way in which man can achieve full personality: for it means the integration of the self about its highest centre, the fine point of the spirit, and its restoration to that life of worship for which it was made. What this life is, and how different from the devotional exercises and experiences with which it is often confused, we can learn from the witness of the saints. . . .

So, a freed self-offering without conditions to the transforming energy of God—the oblation of the natural life with all its gifts, possessions, and capacities, “for all men and women”—must be the first movement of this organic life of worship. It is at once an adoration, an intercession, and a sacrifice. And this approach to the altar and the Cross, accompanied as it must be by a growing sense of sinfulness and



nothingness, an ever-increasing dependence on the divine mercy and help, is met, answered, completed by the action of God: transforming, carrying up into the divine action, and making a vehicle of the divine self-giving, each soul thus abandoned to Him. "My life shall be a real life, being wholly full of Thee." This is the ordained consummation of Christian personal worship: the mystery of creation, fulfilled in the secret ground of every soul.

—*Worship*, 186-90

## CHRISTIAN WORSHIP IS A SUPERNATURAL ACTION

Christian worship is a supernatural action; and more than a supernatural action, a supernatural life. It is the response of the human creature to the besetting charity of God: a response in which man moves out towards Reality, sheds self-occupation, and finds the true basis of his life. Nor is this merely one form of that general recognition of the Holy which is the basis of natural religion. Christian worship is a distinct response to a distinct revelation; God's self-disclosure to His creature at a particular point in time and space, under particular human accidents, entering the time-series to illuminate and save—a disclosure which spreads, to interpret and transform the whole of human experience. With those who are historically minded, we may think chiefly of this revelation in its human aspect, in close connection with the earthly life, death, and continuing presence of Our Lord; and make of this the focal point of worship. Or with those who seek always for the Absolute and Eternal, we can "pass through the Humanity to the Divinity" to dwell upon the outpouring of the Divine Wisdom through this narrow door, and the gathering up of creation in Him. Both these responses lie within the span of the Christian cultus. But whether our outlook be towards the personal or the transcendent, it is here, in this movement of the abiding God towards His creature, that the incentive is given to man's deepest worship, and the appeal is made to his sacrificial love: and all the kinds and degrees of Christian devotion, in prayer and in action, are ways in which he replies to this utterance of the Word.

The true life of the Church, that *Corpus Christi* "whose feet are on earth and whose head is in heaven," is, then, to be thought of as one

continuous Godward stream of adoration, supplication, and sacrificial love. . . .

This adoring, sacrificial life of the spirit-filled Body, having as its nucleus the "blessed company of all faithful people" with their liturgical and actual responses to God in Christ, must spread till its periphery includes all loving acts, all sacrificial dispositions, all life outpoured: for liturgical worship has no meaning, save in so far as it shows forth under tokens the ultimate realities of man's Godward call. That instinctive offering of life which, at the dawn of worship, is represented by the primitive sacrificial rites, already acknowledges the truth which is proclaimed by the Cross, and set forth in the Christian liturgy; the fact that only in and by self-offering man triumphs over his own successiveness, and achieves the absolute action which is the substance of eternal life. Thus the full life of worship requires as its prevenient cause and constant support the self-disclosure and self-giving of the Transcendent God to the creature, within that creature's order: that is to say, Incarnation, with its corollaries of the uttered Word, of prophecy, and of sacramental grace. Only this act of love can wake the creature's love, and call forth the self-offering of that creature to the Transcendent; in self-oblation, consecration, and sacrifice. This truth is the very heart of the Christian mystery. It is fully declared on Calvary, and again set forth in every Eucharist.

...

The devotional and liturgical path is at once Evangelical and Eucharistic. Here the renewed emphasis on the person of Christ and the centrality of the Eucharist, found in various ways and degrees in all parts of the Christian Church at the present day—the tendency to more frequent communion, the deeper and wider significance which is attached to the Church's sacramental life—all point to a fresh recognition of the close dependence of man on the Divine self-giving, and of the Eucharistic rhythm as the supernatural theme of human life. The active path is that of a devoted co-operation with the creative purpose within the temporal world, a striving for perfection; and this, subdued in its own manner to the supernatural theme and pursued in direct dependence on the supernatural power, is also in its own measure sacramental. Here, the selfless spirit of worship pours itself out in that sacrificial effort which seeks to transform the material order, and especially the human scene—cleansing, healing, saving, reconciling, and making of it a fit vehicle of the divine indwelling Life—giving, in fact, concrete and social expression to the Eucharistic ideal. Nor without such concrete and costly expression,

carried to its utmost limits, can Christian adoration be complete. For since God in His Logos is revealed to man in expressive and creative acts within the visible world—through history, and through human personality—so man's response in worship also needs expressive and creative acts; weaving every aspect of our human personality, physical, mental, and spiritual, into its adoring recognition of the beauty and perfection of God. For worship is not merely an expression of the technically religious life. It is the religious life, and so, conterminous with life itself: Creation's response to its Origin and Lord.

—*Worship*, 339-43

## WHAT IS PRAYER?

For what, after all, is prayer? It is a mutual act, a communion of the created spirit with Uncreated Spirit: of the human self, immersed in contingency and succession, with the all-penetrating God who yet transcends contingency and succession—in whom, as St. Augustine said, "are all moments of time." It is therefore the religious act *par excellence*; and rightly understood, should give us a clue to all that religion means in the life of man. "We know in general," says Grou, "that prayer is a religious act; but when it comes to praying, we easily lose sight of the fact that it is a supernatural act, which is consequently beyond our power, and which we cannot properly perform without the inspiration and help of grace." The initiative then, in all genuine prayer, is not human but Divine. It is a work of prevenience. And next, I think, we must add that this communion of spirit with Spirit to which we are mysteriously urged, and which more and more dominates those lives that are becoming sensitive to God, is purposive. It always looks beyond itself to some further creative goal—great or small, general or particular, remote or immediate—to be achieved by this collaboration of Divine and human will and desire. . . .

Prayer, then, in the most general sense, is from the Divine side purposive. Its creative goal, however, may be concerned with almost any level or aspect of physical or spiritual life; for the prayer of a wide-open and surrendered human spirit appears to be a major channel for the free action of that Spirit of God with whom this soul is "united in her ground." Thus it seems certain that the energy of prayer can avail for the actual modifying of circumstance; and that

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its currents form an important constituent of that invisible web which moulds and conditions human life. It may open a channel along which power, healing or enlightenment goes to those who need it, as the watering-can provides the channel along which water goes to the thirsty plant. Or the object achieved may be, as we say, "directly spiritual"; the gradual purifying and strengthening and final sublimation of the praying soul or of some other particular soul. In all such cases, though much remains mysterious, the connection between prayer and result appears as the connection of genuine cause and effect. We are plainly in the presence of that which Elisabeth Lesueur called "a high and fruitful form of action, the more secure that it is secret." On the other hand, the prayer may seem to have no specified aim; and this is specially true of its more developed forms. As spiritual writers say, its energies may simply be "given to God." Thus it may do a work which remains for ever unknown to the praying soul; contributing to the good of the whole universe of spirits, the conquest of evil, the promotion of the Kingdom, the increased energy of holiness. Such general and sacrificial prayer has always formed part of the interior life of the saints, and is an enduring strand in the corporate work of the Church.

—*Collected Papers*, 93-98

## EDUCATION AND WORSHIP

What has the spirit of worship to do with such a view of education? I think it has a great deal. For it seems to me that the fundamental question at the present time is really this: Which is education going to be—God-centered, and so, conscious of mystery, coloured by worship, essentially objective, humble, disinterested; or, man-centered, conscious of human claims and opportunities, and poised on material progress, self-expression, the exploitation of the world in the interests of men? The education of the future, as I see it, must take one of these two paths. It will concentrate on the useful, the this-world, the concrete, will accept a man-centered culture with the dreadful cheapness and flatness that goes with it—that hard, utilitarian form of humanism which is really a disguised animalism, since it leaves out the human spirit and its powers and deepest cravings—or else it will

stand firmly for the Vision of the Principle, for a God-centred culture which does justice to the noblest longings and deepest intuitions of mankind, which looks beyond the here-and-now, relates Time and Eternity. A culture, in fact, which is informed by the Spirit of Worship, even though it may never use that term; and in that spirit seeks to interpret life.

The Christian choice between these extremes is obvious. This does not mean that Christian education, Christian culture, must be overtly pious, or look timidly at new methods, movements and discoveries; but it does mean that all these must and will be placed within the context of Eternity. It means that all is controlled by the opening words of the Office of Lauds—"The Lord is high above all people: and his glory above the heavens"—by that sense of a living Perfection, beyond and above anything that we can conceive, which irradiates the New Testament. . . .

What is worship? It is the adoring acknowledgment of all that lies beyond us—the glory that fills heaven and earth. It is the response that conscious beings make to their Creator, to the Eternal Reality from which they come forth; to God, however they may think of Him or recognize Him, and whether He be realized through religion, through nature, through history, through science, art, or human life and character. These, of course, are the immediate subject-matter of education. How entirely different will be the outlook and work of the teacher who places them in the context of the Transcendent—who does not first consider their here-and-now value, the contribution they make to successful living; but finds in them intimations of reality, hints of the Absolute—from that of the teacher for whom they are in themselves educational objectives. But it is only by entering into the mood of worship that we learn to realize this eternal and unchanging Truth and Beauty penetrating the historical and ever-changing order in which we live, and giving to it all its wonder and its significance. Everything becomes transfigured for those who have achieved this point of view; who enter on the day's work in the spirit of the *Te Deum*, possessed by a total attitude of awestruck love towards the living mystery of Reality. "All the earth doth worship thee!" Physics and geography, zoology, botany, chemistry, geology—yes, even psychology, human wisdom's youngest and most unruly child—all swept into the single act of adoration, the response of the created order to the Divine Mind.

—*Collected Papers*, 222-25

## WORTH AND MEANING OF THE LORD'S PRAYER

Christ, whose earthly life was both a correction and a completion of human life, taught above all else, by example as well as precept, this supreme art and privilege of the borderland creature. For Him, man was a being set in the world of succession and subject to its griefs and limitations; yet able in his prayer to move out to the very frontiers of that world, to lay hold on the Eternal and experience another level of life. How different such a doctrine and practice were from those of his own or any other time, is shown by the demand of the disciples who had witnessed His nights of solitary prayer in the hills: "Teach us *how* to pray." Those who asked this were good and pious Jews, who already accepted the worship of the Name and practice of daily prayer as a normal part of life. But now they realized how far beyond these orderly acts of worship and petition was that living intercourse with the living Father, which conditioned every moment of Christ's life; His link with the Unseen Reality from which He came and the source of His power in the world to which He was sent. Here for the first time they saw prayer, not as an ordered action, or a religious duty, not even an experience; but as a vital relation between man in his wholeness and the Being of God. Here was one who knew in the full and deep sense *how* to pray; and in the light of His practice, they perceived the poverty and unreality of their own.

<sup>1</sup> The New Testament has preserved for us, in our Lord's reply to His followers, a complete description of what Christian prayer should be; its character and objective; its balance and proportion; its quality and tone. As we explore this description and try to realize all that is implied in it, we find the whole world of prayer, its immense demands and immense possibilities, opening before us. Yet in accordance with that steady hold on history, that deep respect for the tradition within which He appeared, which marks the whole of Christ's teaching, the description was given—as the answer to those who asked for the secret of Eternal Life was given—in words which were already familiar to the askers: in seven linked phrases which were a part of Jewish prayer, and can be traced to their origin in the Old Testament. It is as if we went to a saint and asked him to teach us to pray, and he replied by reciting the Quinquagesima Collect. We can imagine the disappointment of the disciples—"We knew all this before!" The answer to this objection is the same as the answer to the Lawyer: this *do* and you shall live. You already have all the information. In-

vest it with realism, translate it into action; phrases into facts, theology into religion. I am not giving you a set formula for repetition, but seven complementary pictures of the one life of prayer. . . .

If . . . we consider the seven clauses of the Lord's Prayer, we shall find here . . . seven doors opening upon "the world that is unwall'd." For these seven clauses represent seven fundamental characters of the one indivisible relation between the spirit of man and the Eternal God; they are seven lessons in prayer, forming together a complete direction for the conduct of our inner life. We begin to realize this, when we consider each separately, and see something of what each of them involves.

(1) Our Father which art in heaven: the sublime invocation which establishes our status before God, not merely as His creatures and slaves but as His children. We are the sons and daughters of the Eternal perfect, inheritors of the Abiding; we have in us the spark of absolute life.

(2) Hallowed be Thy Name: selfless adoration, awe-struck worship as the ruling temper of our life and all we do.

(3) Thy Kingdom come: devoted and eager co-operation with His transforming and redeeming action; the defeat of evil and the triumph of love as the first object of our prayer.

(4) Thy Will be done: active self-abandonment to the mysterious purposes and methods of God, and complete subordination to His design, as the perpetual disposition of the soul.

(5) Give us this day our daily bread: confident dependence on God for all the necessities of life. "Without thee I cannot live."

(6) And forgive us our trespasses, our debts—the too much and the too little—the major types of disharmony with love: the prayer of filial penitence.

(7) Lead us not into temptation: the acknowledgment of our creaturely weakness and trust in His prevenient care.

And then the great affirmation which embraces and justifies our faith, hope and charity: "*Thine* is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory." We ask this of you for only you can do it: no lesser power, no lesser love, will suffice.

"Lover of souls, Great God, I look to thee."

It is too often supposed that when our Lord said, "In this manner pray ye," He meant not "these are the right dispositions and longings, the fundamental acts of every soul that prays," but "this is the form of words which, above all others, Christians are required to repeat." As a consequence this is the prayer in which, with an almost incredible

stupidity, they have found the material of those vain repetitions which He has specially condemned. Again and again in public and private devotion the Lord's Prayer is taken on hurried lips, and recited at a pace which makes impossible any realization of its tremendous claims and profound demands. Far better than this cheapening of the awful power of prayer was the practice of the old woman described by St. Teresa, who spent an hour over the first two words, absorbed in reverence and love.

It is true, of course, that this pattern in its verbal form, its obvious and surface meaning, is far too familiar to us. Rapid and frequent repetition has reduced it to a formula. We are no longer conscious of its mysterious beauty and easily assume that we have long ago exhausted its inexhaustible significance. The result of this persistent error has been to limit our understanding of the great linked truths which are here given to us; to harden their edges, and turn an instruction which sets up a standard for each of the seven elements of prayer, and was intended to govern our whole life towards God, into a set form of universal obligation. . . .

And we note their order and proportion. First, four clauses entirely concerned with our relation to God; then three concerned with our human situation and needs. Four hinge on the First Commandment, three hinge on the Second. Man's twisted, thwarted and embittered nature, his state of sin, his sufferings, helplessness, and need, do not stand in the foreground; but the splendour and beauty of God, demanding a self-oblivion so complete that it transforms suffering, and blots out even the memory of sin. We begin with a sublime yet intimate invocation of Reality, which plunges us at once into the very ground of the Universe and claims kinship with the enfolding mystery. Abba, Father. The Infinite God is the Father of my soul. We end by the abject confession of our dependence and need of guidance: of a rescue and support coming to our help right down in the jungle of life. Following the path of the Word Incarnate, this prayer begins on the summits of spiritual experience and comes steadily down from the Infinite to the finite, from the Spaceless to the little space on which we stand. Here we find all the strange mixed experience of man, overruled by the unchanging glory and charity of God.

—Abba, 1-9



## THE WITNESS OF THE LITURGY

A liturgy, says Dom Cabrol, is "the external and official manifestation of a religion": and the Mass, the typical liturgic rite of the Catholic world, is "the synthesis of Christianity." If, then, our discovery of the mystic life at the heart of the Christian religion be a discovery indeed and not a fantasy, it is here that we may expect to find its corroboration. Here, in that most characteristic of the art-products of Christendom, the ceremonial with which the love and intuition of centuries have gradually adorned the primitive sacrament of the Eucharist, we may find the test which shall confirm or discredit our conclusions as to the character of that life which descends from Jesus of Nazareth. . . .

The fact that the framework of the Mass is essentially a mystical drama, the Christian equivalent of those Mysteries which enacted before the Pagan neophyte the necessary adventures of his soul, was implicitly if not directly recognized in very early times. It was the "theatre of the pious," said Tertullian in the second century; and the steady set of its development from the Pauline sacrament of feeding on the Spiritual Order, the *Fractio Panis* of the catacombs, to the solemn drama of the Greek or Roman liturgy, was always in the direction of more and more symbolic action, of perpetual elaborations of the ritual and theatrical element. To the sacramental meal of apostolic times, understood as a foretaste and assurance of the "Messianic banquet" in the coming Parousia, there was soon prefixed a religious exercise—modelled perhaps on the common worship of the Synagogue—which implied just those preparatory acts of penance, purification and desirous stretching out towards the Infinite, which precede in the experience of the growing soul the establishment of communion with the Spiritual World. Further, the classic exhibition of such communion—the earthly life of Jesus—naturally suggested the form taken by this "initiation of initiations" when its ritual development once began; the allegory under which the facts of the Christian mystery should be exhibited before men. The Mass therefore became for devout imagination during the succeeding centuries, not only the supreme medium through which the Christian consciousness could stretch out to, and lay hold on, the Eternal Order, not only the story of the soul's regeneration and growth, but also the story of the actual career of Jesus, told, as it were, in holy pantomime: indirect evidence that the intuitive mind of the Church saw these as two aspects of one

truth. Hence every development of the original rite was made by minds attuned to these ideas; with the result that psychological and historical meanings run in parallel strands through the developed ceremony, of which many a manual act and ritual gesture, meaningless for us, had for earlier minds a poignant appeal as being the direct commemoration of some detail in the Passion of Christ. . . .

As we look at this drama, which has so often operated in the mystics a mighty dilatation of consciousness, a new intensity of vision, we too are liberated for an instant from the tyranny of use and wont: the mind screwed down to the sense-world becomes attuned to a deeper, wider rhythm. Then it is that we see, beyond and through this pageant, deep into the secret processes of creation: are immersed if only for a moment in the great currents of a spiritual universe, and feel the bourne to which those currents tend. . . .

The Mass is the mirror of souls: as we gaze at it, one by one those mighty spirits whose surrender and triumph it recapitulates, loom up to us from the deeps. We see against this background the value and proportion of their lives. Were all their special commemorations expunged from it, it would remain the supreme memorial of the Saints; the epic of the twice-born soul. Day by day it sets forth the career of advancing spirit, from its new birth to that awful moment of creation when man, surrendered to the universal purpose and inspired by it, dares lay his hands—poor tools of the Eternal Wisdom—on the very substance of the world; and, stripping off its unrealities and accidents, can say of it, "Behold the true Body, the actual Life of God." It was by the way of hard growth and under the spur of glad love—exultant joy that urged him forward, clear self-knowledge pointing out the way—that he came to this achievement: entered into this Kingdom of Real Things. From first to last the "divine comedy" that he played was a ceaseless process of Becoming. It imaged for us that life which is "movement itself," and the consummation in God, the fruition of Eternity, to which that "movement" tends. . . .

Life immanent and life transcendent, the Temporal and the Eternal order, here come together; are discovered as the complementary expressions of a Reality which is one. The divine seed within the world, the divine spark within the soul, has been brought from its hiddenness. By the resistless alchemy of a courageous and self-giving love it has subdued to its purpose, changed to its very substance, the recalcitrant stuff of the material world. That material world in its wholeness is now seen as the Body of Reality: Eternal Life shines clear through the changeful, perishable life of things. To this, the utmost union of

created with creator, the long travail of transcendence was directed: the Mystic Way of life's ascent to God.

—*The Mystic Way*, 333-36, 368

## A ROUTE THAT GOES TO CALVARY

October 25

My poor lamb, I am so terribly sorry for you. I know it is horrible, but it is really all right; and was bound to happen sooner or later. After all, if you choose Christ you start on a route that goes over Calvary, and that means the apparent loss of God as a bit of it. There is no bypass. But as long as you were getting the assurance of God, your offering wasn't *absolute*, was it? This means total sacrifice. So face up to it, and thank Him (for He is there all the time—you must trust your fellow Christians for that) for the privilege of being allowed to taste a little bit of Christ's suffering and offer it for all those you long to help. Apart from this attempt at acceptance, don't do anything. It isn't your fault—it is just part of the route—and God will again show Himself when you are through this bit. Don't struggle with prayer you can't do—just say, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." Continue your Communions quite steadily but don't pull yourself to bits over them. Remember it is you who are temporarily blinded, not the world that has gone black. Early bed, novels, the flicks and so on are all good and help to minimize the nervous strain. Do not be too ferocious in your exercises in detachment at the moment, and try not to be discouraged, though I know this is hard. Your grief at God's absence is the best of all proofs of your love. If you have Dom Chapman's *Letters* by you, read them again. Lots are addressed to people in this state. It is a normal experience in spiritual growth.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 224-25

MAKE THE CROSS THE CENTER OF LIFE

February 7, 1911

I do not think you have ever made the Cross the centre of your life *really*. I do not quite know what you have made the centre, but it looks as though it cannot be that. And you have *got* to, you know. Nothing else will do. And if you do not accept it deliberately, why then it will be forced on you in some subtle and ingenious way, as it is at the present moment. And by struggling and tiring yourself out, you make it worse and add physical and mental fatigue to your spiritual troubles. Accept what you are having, quite simply and obediently. Take it as it comes. Do not "will" or "want" this or that; however virtuous and edifying your wishes may be. All such willings presuppose that you know better than the Spirit of God. And do not get into a despairing condition. These experiences are a perfectly normal part of the spiritual life: which is *not* designed on the lines of a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon."

As to what you ought to do, it is very difficult to advise anyone else in this sort of condition. But I feel pretty sure you ought not to shirk church and your ordinary times of prayer. Only, do not on any account struggle *at all* to feel things or get into communion or anything like that. Surrender yourself altogether and be quite quiet. The thing is not in your hands at present. You are just to remain true to your colours. Leave off mental prayer and meditation. Stick to formal prayer. And it would be well to leave those you ordinarily use, and take for the time to quite fresh ones. I do not know how long you spend in prayer but very likely now you will *not* be able to spend so long. There is no object in exhausting yourself. You have been poring over the whole thing too much; instead of letting it happen, like a spell of bad weather.

I would rather you did some external good works, and thought less for the present about your soul. (I do not mean by this that I think grate-cleaning a proper substitute for church.) I wonder whether you have let your physical health run down and got nervous: because of course that accounts for a lot, and must not be confused with the other.

This sounds an odiously unsympathetic letter, and sort of easy and superior. But it is not meant to be really.

I know quite well what these states are like, and how dreary it is; and do not behave at all well under them. But I know too that sur-

render is the *only* way out of them. Humility and *willing* suffering have got to be learned if we want to be Christians, and some people learn them by boredom instead of by torture. But once you really surrender it is extraordinary how the nastiness goes and you perceive that it *was* "shade of His Hand outstretched caressingly."

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 120-21

## THE WAY OF THE CROSS

October 1, 1909

Yes! I do think all kinds of pain and struggle and all un-easy things done with effort, are or can be what I mean by the Way of the Cross. All people who live honestly, intensely and sincerely are treading it in spite of themselves: but it is better to know what one is about. I suppose taken alone it *does* seem rather an austere view of the universe: but I am sick of the feather-bed and dry champagne type of religion, aren't you? *That* is not "having life more abundantly" anyhow. And surely when it is patent that we are all being kept on the drive (unless we deliberately stagnate) and the whole world and all in it is kept on the drive, and that we are forced to spend our lives and use our energies in humiliating ugly sorts of ways, it is a source of exaltation not of melancholy to know that in this too we are accompanying the Spirit of Christ.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 105

## EVANGELICAL COUNSELS OF POVERTY, CHASTITY, AND OBEDIENCE

Our Lord demanded great renunciation of those who wanted to follow Him. He never suggested that the Christian life was an easy or comfortable affair. The substance of what He asked is summed up in what are called the "evangelical counsels"—Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. We know that those who enter religious communities accept these counsels in their most literal form. They do give up all their possessions, their natural and human relationships, the freedom

of their wills. But in one way or another, something of their spirit is needed by everyone who really desires to follow Christ. The New Testament means what it says when it demands poverty of spirit, purity of heart and filial obedience from all who would do this. And the reason is, that each of these qualities in a different way detaches us from the unreal and self-regarding interests with which (almost without knowing it) we usually fill up our lives. They simplify us, clear the ground for God; so that our relation of utter dependence on Him stands out as the one reality of our existence. So it might be profitable for us this Lent to meditate on the three Counsels and see what light they cast on our own lives.

First, think of *Poverty*. Even outward Poverty, a hard and simple life, the dropping for love's sake of the many things we feel we "must have" is a great help in the way of the Spirit. Far more precious is that inward Poverty of which it is the sacrament; which frees us from possessions and possessiveness and does away with the clutch of "the I, the Me and the Mine" upon our souls. We can all strive for this internal grace, this attitude of soul, and it is a very important part of the life of prayer. The Holy Spirit is called the Giver of Gifts and the Father of the Poor; but His cherishing action is only really felt by those who acknowledge their own deep poverty—who realize that we have literally nothing of our own, but are totally dependent on God and on that natural world in which God has placed us and which is the sacramental vehicle of His action. When we grasp this we are ready to receive His gifts. Some souls are so full of pious furniture and ornaments, that there is no room for Him. All the correct things have been crammed into the poor little villa, but none of the best quality. They need to pull down the curtains, get rid of the knick-knacks, and throw their premises open to the great simplicity of God. Our prayers, too, should be stripped and simplified so that they become a reaching up, a free response to the self-giving of God.

*Chastity*. The Counsel of Chastity does not, of course, mean giving up marriage but something much more subtle and penetrating. It really means the spirit of poverty applied to our emotional life—all the clutch and feverishness of desire, the "I want" and "I must have" taken away and replaced by absolute single-mindedness, purity of heart. This may involve a deliberate rationing of the time and energy we give to absorbing personal relationships with others—unnecessary meetings, talks and letters—to special tastes and interests, or, worst of all, self-occupied daydreams and broodings about ourselves, cravings for sympathy and interest. We have to be very firm with ourselves

about all this, making war on every kind of possessiveness, self-centredness and clutch. From all these entanglements Christ's spirit of chaste Love will set us free; for it is a selfless, all-embracing charity—friendship with God, and with all His creatures for His sake. The innocence of eye which can see God in His creatures belongs to those who love but do not want to possess; and so do not adulterate the vision of the Heavenly Beauty by their own self-centred longings. A selfish craving to enjoy Him for ourselves can even poison our love of God. It is the wrong kind of devotion—it wants to get as well as to give. So the spirit of chastity must transform and unself all our feelings and desires even the most sacred; steady and tranquillizing us, and so placing us wholly at the disposition of God's love.

*Obedience.* This means the total surrender of our wills, which are the great obstacles to our real self-giving to God. The more we get rid of self-chosen aims, however good, the more supple we are to His pressure, the nearer we get to the pattern of the Christian life which is summed up in "not my will but Thine be done." Then, not before, we are ready to be used as God's tools and contribute to His purpose. Since God is the true doer of all that is done, it is always for Him to initiate and for us to respond, and this willing response is the essence of obedience. Obedience means more freedom not less, for it lifts the burden of perpetual choice, and in so doing actually increases our power of effective action by making us the instruments of God's unlimited action. When the whole Church is thus obedient to Him it will be what it is meant to be, "a fellowship of creative heaven-led souls" with power to fulfil its vocation of transforming the world. There is an obligation laid on each of us to do our best to contribute to this great end, and ready obedience to the human beings among whom He has placed us is a very good way of learning obedience to God.

—*The Fruits of the Spirit*, 65-68

## LENTEN TRAINING FOR CHURCH MEMBERS

The object of our rule of prayer is to love, worship and glorify God; and if we want to do this well, we must train ourselves for His service, get ourselves in hand. Now Lent is a time specially set apart for doing this, not merely from the point of view of keeping spiritually

fit, but as an act of love to God. A good Lent means deliberately accepting some of the hardness and obligation of being a Christian, going into training, giving up some of the things we find pleasant and doing other things which are an effort, giving more time and attention to essential things, trimming off superfluous things.

There are three sorts of discipline which we should all try to practise in some way during Lent:

1. *Abstinence.* This means giving up, or reducing our use of some superfluous things—not necessarily food, but comforts and self-indulgences—and generally bracing up and making our lives more simple and plain, and therefore more useful to God. Many of us do not realize what a hold our comforts have on us till we try to give them up. Lent abstinence means trying to give some of them up as an act of love to God.

2. *Almsgiving.* This means being more generous in spending money, time and trouble on other people's needs; and consequently spending less on ourselves.

3. *Prayer.* This means more time and attention given to our communion with God, and a real effort to learn more about Him and so improve the quality of our prayer.

I think every member of the Prayer Group should try in this coming Lent to do something about each of these forms of self-discipline; remembering that whatever we choose to do should be (a) inconspicuous, (b) not inconvenient or irritating to other people, (c) really costing us something. We should be careful only to undertake things which we know that we can carry out. The following suggestions are merely meant to help each to make a Lenten Rule for themselves. One, or at most two from each class should be chosen.

*Abstinence.*

(1) *Bodily Comforts.*

Reduce, or stop entirely, your use during Lent of one or more of the following:

Cigarettes. Chocolates and sweets. After-dinner coffee. Cocktails. Sherry. Hot-water bottles. Bath salts. Bath powder.

Reduce expenditure on cosmetics and give the money saved in charity.

A time-limit of five minutes on hot baths.

Avoid lounging, and sometimes deliberately choose an uncomfortable chair.

Do not linger in bed, but get up at once when called.

No new clothes till Easter.



(2) *Mental Comforts.*

Give up, or reduce.

Novel-reading, films, plays. Reading in bed.

Those who cannot relinquish any of these things for the whole of Lent might at least do so on Wednesdays and Fridays and in Holy Week.

*Almsgiving.*

This includes, besides giving money, giving yourself, your time and trouble; i.e. in visits or letters to lonely and unattractive people, in volunteering for tiresome or uninteresting jobs, in listening patiently to other people's worries, etc. All actions which help others at a real cost to ourselves are alms; and alms are gifts offered to God through His other children.

*Prayer.*

Try, by rising earlier, to give a rather longer time to prayer. Make a point of praying for half an hour in church once a week if possible. Try to form a habit of remembering God and turning to Him during the day; especially praying for peace at noon. The Bishop of Derby has asked all church people to pray for the maintenance in this country of a Christian spirit towards our enemies; and for the making of a just and Christian peace. The Prayer Group might make this a subject of special intercession during Lent and also say daily the Quinquagesima Collect.

Please remember that, whichever of these suggestions you choose to adopt, nothing should be done which involves fuss or strain or interferes with your ordinary duties or with health.

—*The Fruits of the Spirit*, 48-50

## ON KEEPING LENT

February 17, 1909

Now about Lent.

(1) Yes, of course I do think it would be a good plan to go to a weekday celebration: couldn't you go to Communion every week—during Lent only? Don't answer that it would be too exciting. It need not be if you handle yourself properly.

(2) Please say the Way of the Cross at least once a week during Lent; preferably in a church where the stations are set up, but if

## THE ROOTS AND THE FRUITS OF PRAYER

this is out of the question, say it by yourself. You can easily make your own meditations if you dislike those in the books. Stick to it even if it seems at first an arid and unsuitable sort of devotion. To me, the way in which it weaves together and consecrates every misery, injustice, humiliation, difficulty, weariness and squalor incident to human life, raises them to the *nth* degree of intensity and exhibits them in the full blaze of the Divine, is a sort of inexhaustible marvel.

(3) Put aside temporarily all ideas of unitive prayer, and devote yourself rather to plodding along, to intercession—using the whole strength of your will in it, not casually recommending people—and to curing faults. Pick one out and go for it steadily, noticing each day how many times you have committed it. *Don't* go to Church or to Communion primarily to “get help,” but to offer service.

As to what to aim at. What you want is that steadfastness of spirit which is only obtained by *realizing* the greatness of God and the littleness of everything else except as a means to Him; meditate on these indubitable facts, and hold on to them with your will.

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 92-93

## SOME DISCIPLINES FOR LENT

April 12, 1911

As far as I know—but I do not know much and apparently rather less every day!—what you now see about the Cross does seem to me right. It is the active and heroic and glad taking on of the painful and arduous, for the sake of love, and because it is the best on the whole of the poor little things we can offer.

And of course it does need “ascetic” training of some sort: and such training, if wisely chosen, is good, for all sorts of other and less exalted reasons. Soft comfiness is the soul's worst enemy, and those who have let it become necessary to them will probably find heaven uncommonly like hell! The question is, how and where in a normal, active life, to fit in the said discipline and I agree with you, it is *very* difficult!

The one great rule must be, you must not do anything which lowers your all-round efficiency for life—if the absent hot-water bottle means always bad nights and slackness next day, it is not a good thing to choose. Ditto about food.

Personally—in case the idea is of use to you—I have taken to knocking off all aesthetic pleasure in Lent; *all* poetry, fiction, theatres, music. This I find, at any rate at first, a real deprivation, and absolutely harmless! Also, doing rather dreary social duties one is inclined to shirk and giving up attractive ones. . . . All this sounds very little and is, alas: but it makes a sort of beginning, and there are constant choices turning up in daily life, when one can try to choose the harder side *pour le bon motif*. We all want bracing, as you say, nowadays: and certainly the fact that the idea of going without some external comfort worries one is a danger signal that should not be neglected. Only, always keep your eye fixed on the object in view and never let yourself think the self-denials you manage to perform important in themselves. The wildest austerities of the most ecstatic saints are hardly visible against “the glory that shall be revealed.”

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 123-24

CHRIST, the CHURCH, and the SACRAMENTS

***PART FIVE***

## WORSHIP AND THE INCARNATION

Since the Christian revelation is in its very nature historical—God coming the whole way to man, and discovered and adored within the arena of man's life at one point in time, in and through the Humanity of Christ—it follows that all the historical events and conditions of Christ's life form part of the vehicle of revelation. Each of them mediates God, disclosing some divine truth or aspect of divine love to us. Here lies the importance of the Christian year, with its recurrent memorials of the Birth, the Manhood, the Death and the Triumph of Jesus, as the framework of the Church's ordered devotion. By and in this ancient sequence, with its three great moments of Epiphany, Easter and Pentecost, its detailed demonstration in human terms of the mysteries of Incarnation and Redemption, the Christian soul is led out through succession to a contemplation of the eternal action of God. In Christ, and therefore in all the states and acts of Christ, history and eternity meet. Here, in One "who lived and died and is alive for evermore" the worshipper adores the abiding God, self-revealed among men. "His resplendent figure lights up the whole liturgy." Moreover, since in Christ the Christian sees God acting, each phase of His life is to be regarded as a theophany, and has a sacred significance. It is the expression of an interior state directly produced by God, a necessary part of the redemptive action of God; and so invites a particular acknowledgment in worship.

"This truth," says Bérulle, "obliges us to treat the deeds and mysteries of Jesus, not as things past and finished but as things living and present, and even eternal, from which we too must gather a fruit present and eternal."

This doctrine may seem too abstract to affect the common course of Christian devotion. Yet it has great importance; for it gives an explanation, agreeable to theology, of a persistent trend in that worship both in the East and the West, which is otherwise easily discredited as the work of religious sentimentalism. We cannot enter a Catholic or an Orthodox Church, without finding ourselves confronted by a type of devotion entirely concentrated on the events and phases of the life of Jesus, especially the circumstances of His infancy and His death; which is part and parcel of historic Christian worship, and therefore even in its crudest forms demands our sympathy and respect. The ikon or image of the Virgin and her Child; in the West the

Christmas crib, the "stations" of the Passion, and the Crucifix; in the East, the glorious and triumphant figure of the Risen Christ—these attract a devotion which finds here the focus of a genuine worship, an open and visible path leading to the invisible God, yet seldom pauses to ask why this should be so. The reason, says Bérulle, is that the living Christ disclosed and still discloses to the Christian soul, by these mysteries of His earthly life, the supernatural dispositions, the grace, and the love which are always living, present, and active in eternity. As it is God Who in and through this human life utters His Word and reaches out to men; so in each phase and moment of this human life, He shows something of His beauty and generosity. . . .

So, the homely pieties of the Christian year, directed as they are to the successive phases of the Divine redeeming action in history, point beyond themselves, and witness to those profound spiritual realities which transcend history and yet give history its significance—"the divine, holy, spotless, immortal, heavenly, life-giving, awful Mysteries of Christ." Hence their value as vehicles of God's continuing self-communication and man's response. Hence even in their most naïve expression, they must never be despised by us: for they are a necessary part of that distinct revelation of the Holy to which Christian worship is the creature's answering movement of gratitude and love. Is it not therefore surprising that emphasis upon the Christian year is common to all forms of Christian traditional worship; and has, especially in the East, a deep mystical significance. . . .

For another reason, too, devotion to the Mysteries of the Gospel must form an integral part of the cultus; namely their educative value. Since everyone, whatever his vocation, is obliged to reproduce the common curve of human life in its passage through time—to be born, to grow, make choices and accept responsibilities, form some human relationships, take some place in the social order, to meet hardship, difficulty and disillusion, to suffer, and at last to die—it follows that all have in this inevitable sequence of experiences something which can be transformed and directed Godwards; or can, in other words, be turned into worship. And it will be through the adoring contemplation of an actual life, so near his own, yet so entirely transcending it, that man will learn to do this best. So, in that devout commemoration of the successive Mysteries of the life of Jesus, from Christmas to Easter and to their consummation in Pentecost, on which the liturgical year of the Church is based, all the phases of human experience are lit up by the radiance of eternity and brought into relation with the inexhaustible revelation of God in the flesh: giving



the Christian a model he can never equal but a standard to which he must ever seek to conform. The helplessness and humility of infancy, the long hidden period of discipline and growth, the lonely crisis and choice of the Temptation, above all the heart-shaking events of Holy Week, Easter, and the Forty Days—all these become disclosures of the Supernatural made through and in man, and therefore having a direct application to man's need and experience. Each shows the Divine self-giving from a different angle; and so asks from man a humble gratitude and a generous response.

—*Worship*, 73-77

## CHRIST THE TEACHER

And it is our humble childlike reception of Him which alone gives us the power to teach. For some, of course, the whole of Christ's life is one great dramatic lesson. He taught by His visible presence and teaches by His invisible presence still. He teaches by His own silent transcendence of our universal failure, our self-occupation, pessimism, jealousy, conceit, ambition; shows us these things for what they are. He teaches by and in His Church, His Sacraments, His Saints: all alive because united with His Spirit—*Lo! I am with you always!* He shows us what a life is like that has really been reborn in the Divine order, entirely subordinate to the interests of God. We see in Him its nature and quality and inevitable sequence, how it handles life, what it effects and how.

All this is just what we want to know if we are to rise above our confusion and be effective agents of His work. It is not an easy syllabus. Temptation at the beginning—many never get further than that—and Gethsemane very near the end. And in thus teaching us He uses the whole web of life, as in the synagogue. He still unrolls the great scroll of history and lights that up; and sometimes the small secret scroll of our own inner history, generally kept rolled up tight because we don't very much care to look at it. He comes and unrolls it in all its shabbiness with all its odious record of wrong things, cheap things, persistent self-love and self-interest, chances of generosity missed, love we failed to value, sacrifices we did not make. He opens that roll and reads from it and we realize for the first time what a hash we have made of our chance of Christlikeness and what that

really means over against God. That is one of the most purifying, abasing and bracing experiences which can happen to a soul. Christ teaches contrition to His poor little pupil helpers and slaves. Our past sins and mistakes, seen thus, teach us the humbling lesson of our own great frailty and so throw us back on God. If we take them the right way they can at least cure our cocksureness, and that is a great gain. If we look back on the days when we were bright young creatures and thought we understood life, perhaps it will cure us of the suspicion that we really do understand it now.

So He can use the lessons of the past, the scroll which records all our jumbled memories, to teach us self-knowledge. And self-knowledge compelled by Christ is the only path to a real life-giving penitence, for it is only when He unrolls that scroll with His own hands—"His holy and venerable hands" as the ancient prayer of consecration says—that we learn what sin is, by contrast with His compassionate, self-giving holiness; the holiness of One in perfect accord with God, who teaches with the absolute and unselfconscious authority, the disconcerting realism of the channel of God—not the priggish exactitude of the moralist and critic of society. And He teaches us just where we are, in our own synagogue, our own boat, our own town, or just where we catch up with Him by the side of the lake or in the hills. He uses all the stuff of our everyday life, the forms of everyday religion, as His school material: that everyday life familiar to all, yet having a sacred significance no one can ever exhaust. And so He always moves easily and safely between the two extremes which threaten the teacher—the temptation to aim at easy shallow popularity on the one hand or at a difficult exclusive superiority on the other.

Each gets from Him what they need because He always thinks of them, not of His own doctrine and Person or the novelty and importance of His message. Those who are called to be His pupil-teachers in the world today must think a little about this. Just look at that beautiful absence of rigorism, that gentle, flexible, life-giving method which is yet never sentimental, vague or soft. Consider what humbleness, what reverence for our human nature it involves; in one line it is and has the Truth of God. Look at the willingness to give milk to babes because they are babes; not to risk spiritual indigestion by trying to make them tackle a square meal of pure truth. Christ never seems at first sight to be giving pure truth; yet in the end He is the only teacher who manages to give it in a way that feeds souls of every level and type. Wherever He comes, He brings the life-giving mystery



of God: but giving the mystery in and with the homeliness, weaving together both worlds.

—*Light of Christ*, 48-50

## CHRIST THE HEALER

Some people are rather troubled about the amount of space the healing of the sick takes in the Gospels. Teaching and healing between them take the whole centre of the record, practically cover the ministry. Perhaps we feel that is not quite spiritual enough for the supernatural revelation of God to man. This is because we are apt to think of healing as getting rid of people's normal pain, disease, disability, distress. But healing is really restoring to the true normality, restoring to full manhood, mending the breaches in our perfect humanity, and making us again what God intends us to be. It shows us His life-giving Spirit; the Lord and Giver of Life ever at work producing and restoring fulness of life. For all disease of soul or body is a subtraction from human nature, a way of being sub-standard. There are no colds in Paradise. So, healing of any sort is a kind of creative or rather regenerating work, a direct expression and furtherance of God's will. It means bringing life back to what it ought to be, mending that which has broken down, healing our deep mental and spiritual wounds by the action of His charity, giving new strength to the weak, new purity to the tainted.

And this is not only part of God's character; it is also a definite characteristic of every human soul's vocation as declared in Christ. In one form or another it has got to be present in our lives. His healing loving-kindness has got to flow through us if we are really self-given to Him. You know the great Confraternity of the Misericordia in Italy to which men of all classes belong, in which all are equal and every member liable to be called out in the service of the sick and dying. We are all by our baptism members of the Misericordia of Christ, all "menders" of His creatures; all givers of health and light whether to body, mind or spirit. All those in whom His passion for bringing things back to normal is at work are part of the great healing action of His Mystical Body. . . .

Let us look into our minds and souls. Could we claim a clean bill of health? Is our whole psychical and spiritual machinery running right, quite adjusted and adequate to circumstances? No old wounds to

self-esteem that give us twinges? No auto-intoxication of jealousy, resentment, depression quietly going on? No acidity? No displacements, adhesions, no chronic ailments? Are we fit, as His agents should be, for all weathers, all jobs? "Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart," says the Psalmist. Prove me, examine my reactions. "Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me and lead me in the way everlasting." That kind of internal examination may be very painful, shameful, searching; but only those willing to submit to it can hope for the full healing of Christ. His diagnosis comes before His treatment.

All sin is disease. It takes many forms. Some of us seem liable to intermittent fevers; some to self-poisoning by pride and self-love, which are always thwarting our perfect adjustment to life. We can't produce the right anti-toxin ourselves. He must enter our lives with His spirit of humility and renunciation and cleanse us of infection; must blend His spirit with our spirit to give us of His health. So, too, He heals our jangled and distracted minds, our turbulent desires and conflicts, by the infusion of His peace; all the scratches life has made on our souls, that general sensation of soreness and stiffness and uneasiness which reduces our natural power of adjustment to life; the terrible spiritual insomnia in which we toss and find no rest, those torturing devils so easy for the overdriven modern to believe in—somehow, we don't know how, He gives us release. They are all cast out by the sanity of holiness. "Christ," says à Kempis, "establishes us in God by making us think on such things as cause inward peace of soul." Not, of course, unless we want it, want it so much that we cease our struggles and abandon ourselves to His power. The self-abandoned prayer which ceases its own struggles and its own patent medicines and places itself with entire confidence in His hand, alone opens up paths for His healing energy. "Lord, if Thou wilt Thou canst. Say the word only. I know you can say it. Have mercy! Cast forth my particular private devil. I can't."

So, too, if we hand ourselves over with confidence and without reserve He will exercise on us His preventive medicine, simplify our lives, teach us what to do and what to leave out, persuade us to a plainer, more regular, more wholesome spiritual diet. Many souls go on and on suffering in a dull way from chronic indigestion and wonder why they never feel quite right. "Just a ten minutes' reading of the New Testament and perhaps a bit of St. Teresa and a chapter of Higher Criticism (intellectually so important) and that Office I am bound by the Guild Rules to say. And my self-examination of course and per-

haps a bit of Mr. So-and-so's helpful little book. And I must not forget the social side of Christianity! And then five minutes' silence—but I haven't time for more."

And yet, this hastily absorbed selection of odds and ends is only required to serve one simple purpose—to feed our Godward lives—and the only thing that matters is that it shall contain the essential foodstuffs that do that. There is a biochemistry of the soul and it is surely part of our religious duty to arrange our religious meals in accordance with its laws and with some care; to take what really nourishes us and take it under conditions which help us to relish and digest our food. A good spiritual writer is like a good cook who dishes up food in a suitable way—but the food itself is Divine. As a certain wise Prioress said, "Most books on religion have thousands of words—we need only one word, GOD—and that surrounded not by many words but by silence." Christ, the soul's healer, gives us or will give us that word which quiets our fever, feeds, steadies and deepens our life, builds up our resistance to the toxins which get into our blood-stream and sap our powers.

And so we turn to ourselves and ask, how does the mysterious light from this window illumine and reprove our attitude, our lives, our work, our prayer? For as Members of Christ, Ministers of Christ, we are committed to take our part in His healing action in the world.

—*Light of Christ*, 57-65

## CHRIST THE RESCUER

As we make our pilgrimage round the Cathedral, each fresh stand seems at first as if it completed the story. And for some souls it does, at least for a time. Christ, the revelation and thought of God indwelling our world, living our life, teaches us His wisdom about life and heals the wounds of life. At first we think that is what the world needs and that is enough. But after a bit, as we get to know our weakness and as life batters and maims us, we know we all badly need mending before we can fully profit by the lessons of the teacher. If we stop there, at the perfect Teacher and Healer, solving the problems and healing the diseases of our strange and difficult existence and calling for our co-operation even in His work—that sort of humanitarian Christianity which is so popular today and which is already

the loveliest thing within our world—if we don't look beyond it, it seems complete. But it is less than half the total illumination given us by God in Christ; we are here only just reaching the fringe of His mystery and greatness and full demand. God enters human life not only to help, teach and complete it, but to over-rule, transform, rescue and control circumstance—a saving energy intervening with an entire and noble freedom, constrained only by love. *Kyrie Eleison! Christe Eleison!* Lord have mercy! Christ have mercy! We appeal to One who has power to save and to change. "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath Day," says Christ to the Jewish rigorists, surely with an ironic smile. "Who is this," say the disciples caught in the tempest, "that even the winds and waves obey Him?"

The teaching of men how to live, the healing and reviving touch on their weakness and disease, might have come from a non-Christian revelation of reality. But more than that flows out to us from the eternal life of Christ within His Church. We cannot live long within the aura of that life without experiencing something that comes in, breaking in from beyond the natural order, to save, change, direct and feed us—an intervening power—the merciful stooping down of Perfection to enter into His little creature's affairs, the energetic rescuing action of the Eternal Christ.

Look at this picture. You see the stormy lake and the little boat with its low freeboard and shallow draught, just as used on the Lake of Galilee now, and the frightened faces of the fishermen. And standing above them the solitary and tranquil figure of Christ ruling the storm; more than that, for through and in that storm He is revealed to them as never before. We never realize that power in full until we too are caught and threatened by the violence and hostility of events or the frightful storms of our own unstable natures. It is then that His mysterious action is felt within the circumstances of our lives. . . . "And He went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased; and they were sore amazed."

Sometimes we are as it were in the middle of the lake and the storm breaks, usually from a quarter we don't expect, and we are doubtful whether the little boat is going to stand it. We feel helpless, making no progress and are inclined to say: "I have gone to bits; I have no help, no support. *This* cannot be a spiritual life." We begin to lose our grip. The boat is very cranky and unstable, the waves very threatening and steep, the sky darkening, we are in utter wretchedness and discouragement.

It was like that when He "went up unto them into the ship and

the wind ceased." Then the situation was transformed by His presence. One way or another, life brings every awakening Christian soul this experience. When we recognize and reflect on it—for it may come in a way that seems very simple—it fills us with awe and grateful love. God in Christ intervenes between us and the storm that threatens to overwhelm us. His power is brought into action just where our action fails; He comes to the rescue of those caught in the toils of circumstance.

This is a secret that has always been known to men and women of prayer, something we can trust and that acts in proportion to our trust. Sometimes it is on our soul that He lays His tranquillizing touch and stills the storm; sometimes on the hurly-burly of our emotional life, sometimes on events that we think must destroy us or the people and causes we love and who are mysteriously modified by the Spirit that indwells and over-rules them. We do feel sometimes as if we are left to ourselves to struggle with it all. He is away praying on the mountain, or He is asleep in the boat; the waves seem to be getting decidedly higher, the night is very dark and we don't feel sure about our gear—we begin to lose our nerve for life and no one seems to mind. Certainly life is not made soft for Christians; but it is, in the last resort, safe. The universe is safe for souls. The disciples were thoroughly frightened, exhausted, soaked to the skin, but *not* destroyed. At the critical moment He went up into the ship and restored safety, sanity, peace. So, too, when the four thousand were hungry and without resources and the disciples got very worried about it. But they *were* all fed and fed in an entirely unexpected way. So Christ stands over against history and in its darkest and most dangerous moments we receive a new revelation of His power.

We can never forecast the path God's energy of rescue will take. It is never any use saying to Him, "I am getting desperate! Please answer my prayer by the next post and please send an open cheque." He *will* answer but not necessarily like that; more probably He will transform and use the unlikely-looking material already in hand—the loaves and the tiny fishes—looking up to Heaven and blessing it and making it do after all. A priest was once asked if many miracles happened at Lourdes. He said, "Yes, many; but the greatest are not miracles of healing but the spiritual miracles, the transformation of those who pray desperately for cure of this or that and come back, not physically cured, but filled with peace and joy, surrendered to the Will of God, conformed to the Cross."

—*Light of Christ*, 68-72

## THE MYSTERY OF THE RESURRECTION

Out of that healing darkness in which the soul was lost on Calvary, there steals upon its vision "like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb," the radiant form of a new transfigured life in which it is to share. Gently that life comes forth from the very heart of Earth our Mother: "not with observation," not with the sudden effulgence of the lightning flashing from east to west, but with the mild unhurried majesty of dawn. "Awake thou that sleepest, arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." The flooding tide of His Divine life invades the finite thing reborn in Him, filling to the brim the emptied channels of its surrendered selfhood, blessing with a new vitality its every faculty and deed: and suddenly in an ecstasy of joy and wonder it knows itself a veritable "partaker of the Divine Nature," remade in Him, "in another form, another glory, another power."

The soul comes from the dereliction and self-naughting of Calvary—from that unimaginable darkness of mind and loneliness of heart—into the world of the Risen Christ: into that everlasting Easter-fact, the Kingdom of Reality ablaze with God, which here and now awaits us. . . .

For every soul that follows in His footsteps, that elects the heroic vocation of surrender—the scourge, the rosy crown, the heavy cross—the Easter Garden waits at the end of sorrows, fragrant with unimaginable perfumes, and made lovely with the simplest growing things. Here and now, it stretches out beyond our earthy sepulchre, athwart the teeming streets and huddled houses that seem to shut us from the light. Christ walks in it: and behold! not all the cohorts of His Father's angels mark His presence, but hedge and coppice breaking into flower. Suddenly from the tomb where our separated life was laid away, we shall come out into that world, so real and so supernal. Shy and astonished, we shall move with tentative footsteps upon its kindly turf.

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the House of the Lord." Green-meshed are the airy vaults of it, and violet-blue its cool and shaded floor. The innocent furred acolytes of His Mysteries go without fear between its aisles; the birds and angels sit together in its trees. A Gardner moves between those borders, and blossoms spring between His wounded feet. New life He radiates, and not alone

on human spirits. All Creation waits upon His coming; and where He passes by He brings it peace.

Here at last His veritable encounter is made possible to us: here the deepest secrets of His Love are declared to us under the simplest accidents of natural life. "My beloved is mine, and I am His: He feedeth among the lilies." As the veil that hangs before the Tabernacle, so do these dew-drenched branches, so does this heavenly inflorescence, shroud the gateway to the Garden of His joy. "My secret to myself": once more for a space the soul is alone with it; alone with the whispered messages of morning, the hushed ecstasies of life. Only the radiant wounds that bless its members remind it of the torments of the past. "In the House of its Friend" it received them. This at last it knows, and knowing, does not seek to understand: for now it is "one thing with Him," buried with Him, risen with Him—at last its life is hidden with Christ in God. Human love comes to meet it; but in this rapt and sacred hour the soul must cry, "Touch me not," for another contact is about its limbs. God enfolds it as an atmosphere: it stands on earth, and yet it lives in heaven.

What, then, is it to mean for us, this Resurrection-life of the transfigured soul, remade upon the levels of Reality? What did it mean for our Master, in the matchless hour of His return, when He walked the solitary garden and communed with its still and fragrant life? It meant a coming back to earth of that deified spirit which was caught into the arms of God in its utmost surrender: a deliberate reversion, in the fulness of its power, in the ardour of its burning charity, to the plane of the shadowy, the imperfect, the unreal. It meant the beginning of the Eternal Return which the Holy Eucharist makes actual to us; a self-spending, a giving of Himself under the humblest limitations, that He may be food for the very life of men. This it is that makes us certain of the perfection of Christ's union with the Father—not His ineffable immersion in that Divine Reality, but His sweet and steady care for littlest human interests, the undistorted love which led Him to transfigure with His presence the poor diurnal life of common things.

He does not disdain to entice with gentlest intimacies our reluctant faith and trust. He comes into our midst and shows to us the wounds on His creative hands, His untiring feet; even the way that leads to His sacred heart. We find Him in the solitary mountain. He stands among us on the shore. He is a Guest at our table, and ministers to us the hidden manna, the very substance of His life. He accepts even the fruits of our poor labours—gentlest of all the courtesies of God.

Not for His own sake, but for the sake of humanity He returns to us; returns to the patient earth, His mother and ours. There in the early morning He comes to meet us, bearing that banner of our redemption which is the ensign of His triumph and our hope; proof that the Pathfinder has found a way. There He nests in the heart of life and waits our search of Him, waits till he can again come to birth in the arid and reluctant human soul. . . .

It is the dearest ambition of the Christian, the final evidence of consecrated love, that the Easter-fact may be manifest in him also, even under the veils and limitations of the flesh. He too would live in the interests of humanity the transfigured life in the here-and-now. Since there dwells in his heart the very presence of the Strong and the Immortal, he desires that this strength and immortality may be his own, to spend for other men.

Surely here the desire of man encounters the desire of God which runs to meet it. From the Easter-fact, transcendent life is indeed poured out on us, to take and make our own and spend again. It streams upon us from the altar: it meets us in the silence of the hills; it buds mysteriously within the soul. Yet not for our own sakes is it given us; rather that we may follow in the steps of our Pattern, and go back to entincture with new gold the desirous world of men. For love's sake we shall return to them, in their midst our true, completed life shall be manifest; here, not in some far-off region of the "spiritual," begin the triumphant mysteries of His Grace.

—*The Spiral Way*, 125-34

## ABOUT CHURCHGOING

February 6, 1912

About church-going I am quite of your opinion. I should never dream myself of going to a cheerful hearty Evensong, and shouting hymns by way of expressing my devotion! I do not feel that it is anyone's duty to do so unless that sort of thing is a natural act of worship to them. No doubt it is excellent for M . . . : but a quiet hour of meditation and reading at home is probably far better for you. I do think it is right and necessary to attend a Celebration every Sunday but anything beyond that seems to me a matter of individual piety which one is at liberty to settle for oneself. As to Festivals—



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other things being equal, I do think it desirable to observe them in some way; and unless one does observe them, they will never come to mean anything to one—just as it is impossible to understand intercession unless one practises it, and they all do or can mean something—have a definite place in the interior drama of faith.

*Letters of Evelyn Underhill, 132*

## ONE NEEDS THE CHURCH

March 19, 1924

Thank you so much for your very kind and interesting letter. . . . I am indeed glad you have come to see so clearly how necessary it is that we should try humbly to accept and use religious institutions and not cut ourselves off from history and the common life, if we are to develop a really wholesome and Christian type of spirituality. The withdrawal of the "cultured" from Church life has two very bad results,

(a) it either shrivels or puffs up their souls,

(b) it deprives the institutional life of the contribution they ought to be making to it. And as a matter of fact, though the first return to these things is hard and dry, especially to the naturally meditative temperament, the more we consent to use them, the more they gradually give us.

I don't mean by this that I admire "Churchiness," but that a moderate, regular sharing, in the degree suited to each, in institutional practice will always in the end enrich, calm, de-individualize our inner life.

*—Letters of Evelyn Underhill, 152*

## THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH

The priest's life of prayer, his communion with God, is not only his primary obligation to the Church; it is also the only condition under which the work of the Christian ministry can be properly done. He is called, as the Book of Wisdom says, to be a "friend of God, and

prophet": and will only be a good prophet in so far as he is really a friend of God. For his business is to lead men out towards eternity; and how can he do this unless it is a country in which he is at home? He is required to represent the peace of God in a troubled society; but that is impossible if he has not the habit of resorting to those depths of the spirit where His Presence dwells.

We all know this; but it is desperately hard to keep our grasp of it, and go on putting it into practical effect. Everything in modern life, and perhaps especially in the life of the parish clergy, tends to make it more difficult. For the first thing that occurs to us is, that the mandate of Christ's minister is to feed and cherish His sheep, to give his life for that; and in most cases this is, and in all cases it can be, a full-time job. The demands on the time, interest, kindness, patience and energy of the faithful priest are constant, and must be met; for his model is One who serveth. So the determined setting aside, and holding against all comers as a first charge, of a substantial daily time for communion with God, might not in his case be justified if it were only done for the sake of his own soul. But it has a far greater sanction than that; and perhaps it will clear the real issue if we state this at once in the strongest terms. A priest's life of prayer is, in a peculiar sense, part of the great mystery of the Incarnation. He is meant to be one of the channels by and through which the Eternal God, manifested in time, acts within the human world; reaches out, seeks, touches and transforms human souls. His real position in the parish is that of a dedicated agent of the Divine Love. The Spirit of Christ, indwelling His Church, is to act through him. . . .

Of course it is true that the direct worship of God does not cover the whole of the vocation of the clergy. The Christian minister is ordained to be both deacon and priest; the special character and grace of the diaconate is not obliterated when he receives the great privileges of the priesthood. He is still one of those called to serve the brethren, as well as to go up to the altar of God: and it is that double vocation, turned towards the Eternal and towards the human—love of God and love of souls—which makes the tension and richness of the priest's life, and must be reflected in his prayer. For him, at any rate, the disciplined and faithful cultivation of the inner life, the deepening of spiritual sensitiveness, can never be a self-regarding task: it is the very condition of his effectiveness.

All this means the maintenance of a right balance between the visible and invisible, active and contemplative sides of the religious vocation: adherence to God in prayer, and because of that adherence,

supported and fed by it, a creative, cherishing, patient, redeeming love and service poured out to men.

When we come down from principles to practice, the demand on the strength and time of the parish priest is often so great that it seems as though this exclusive attention given to God is only to be had at the expense of time and attention which are needed by his people; that here, solitary communion with God is in the nature of a spiritual self-indulgence, and that detailed response to the demands and needs of the flock must always be nearer to the mind of Christ. But surely Christian history steadily contradicts that view. It is always the priest whose life of prayer is deep and strong; who is ready for the self-forgetful labour and constant sacrifice which it requires. The vocation of the Christian minister is a supernatural vocation; and how can he fulfil it, unless he lives a supernatural life? Much is now being said about evangelism; but before we get effective evangelism, we have to get effective evangelists. Evangelism is useless, unless it is the work of one devoted to God, willing and glad to suffer all things for God, penetrated by the attractiveness of God. New machinery, adaptations and adjustments, are not the first need of the Church of England; but more devoted, adoring, sacrificial souls. These are supernatural qualities, given by God in our hours of direct attention to Him; and these are the only lasting source of that charity, that invincible loving-kindness which will help us to show the beauty of Christ to others and so win them for God. It is terribly hard for human beings to believe this, believe it enough to carry it out; but those who do carry it out have no doubt of its truth. . . .

What, then, are the chief factors which the parish priest has at his disposal for this purpose? Primarily, I think, they are three. First his own life of prayer, his communion with God; next, the parish church, and that which is done in it; last, the formation of praying groups. We begin therefore by considering the matter under these three heads.

First, the priest's own devotional life. This is decisive. The primary way in which he can lead his people to pray is by doing it himself. The spirit of prayer is far more easily caught than taught. By a very large proportion of his flock, its nature will only be realized in so far as they see it in him, and discover that for him it is the very substance of life. "For their sakes I sanctify Myself." That text has a most searching application to the priestly members of the Body of Christ. . . .

The priest who prays often in his own church, for whom it is a spiritual home, a place where he meets God, is the only one who has

any chance of persuading his people to pray in *their* own church. True devotion can only be taught by the direct method. The mere presence and atmosphere of a pastor who does what he says, and does more than he says—for whom prayer is the central reality of life—who comes early into his church to make his preparation before the Eucharist, is absorbed in that which he is going to do, does it with recollection and love, and returns to the church to make his thanksgiving among those to whom he has given the Bread of Life—this teaches prayer. So, too, the saying of Matins and Evensong in church is a most valuable help to the same end. Even though the priest may often do this alone, the very fact that he does it counts. It is an act of devotion to God, done for his people; and if it entails a sacrifice of convenience or time, all the better. . . .

Izaak Walton, in his life of George Herbert, describes how Mr. Herbert went twice every day to his church of Bemerton, rang the bell and said his daily Office; and because all the common people loved him dearly, how even the ploughman would pause in his ploughing when "Mr. Herbert's saints' bell rang to prayers." That might still happen; and if it did, it would mean that twice a day the spirit of prayer was radiating from the church, which is intended as its visible shrine and abiding place, to permeate the common life of the parish. . . .

After the careful and disciplined development of his personal life towards God, I think the priest's next step in teaching his people to pray, in so far as this is possible, will be the bit-by-bit interpretation of the services. A complete transformation of their attitude to those services can be effected by showing them what the liturgy means and is, what tremendous realities it expresses; getting behind the beautiful Tudor English, and the symbolism which so often means nothing to those who use it, and revealing the great spiritual action in which we take part when we join the Church's corporate worship. And further, linking this spiritual action—of which the liturgy is the outward dress—with the actualities of daily life on one hand, and the unchanging fact of God on the other hand. . . .

This brings us to the last of the three resources which every parish priest has at his disposal, for the fostering of the life of prayer among his people; the formation of the praying group. I do not mean by this a hot-housy association of pious ladies, whose extreme exhibition of fervour too often tends to put every one else off. This should be avoided at all costs. But there is surely no parish where it is quite impossible to find a few people, preferably quite simple and ordinary people, who care for their religion, and, if asked to do a bit of real spir-

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itual work for it, will respond. These are the people who can form, as it were, the growing-point of the parochial life of prayer. They will probably be found among the more frequent communicants; among those who are already doing some kind of parish work; and very often, among the quiet, diffident, rather unnoticed members of the congregation. They should be asked personally and individually—there will probably be only two or three to begin with—to undertake to meet in church once a week at a suitable time, and pray together for half an hour; or perhaps less than this at the beginning. At first, of course, the priest must take a leading part, help, suggest and perhaps instruct; and the fact that, as the group develops, he will naturally ask it to pray for particular things and persons, will always keep him in close touch with it. But the sooner these meetings pass into lay control, the better. . . .

These groups need to be formed slowly and quietly, through personal contacts; but once established it is astonishing how quickly they become bound together, lose self-consciousness and shyness, begin to find new members and develop a corporate life of their own. If a group goes well, it will gradually become the nucleus of a network of prayer, spreading through the parish like leaven, deeply concerned with its life and problems, lifting up to God its anxieties, sorrows and sins. Into it can be drawn the invalids and old people; all those who cannot come to the church, but who can undertake to pray with the group at the agreed time in their own homes, and can be asked to remember its objects of prayer. In this way they are drawn into a living spiritual fellowship and released from loneliness; and are given an entirely new sense of sharing in the life and work of their church. All suffering can be transformed into prayer, and added to the Cross, and so given a new meaning and dignity; and here is one of the simplest ways in which this great spiritual truth can be taught.

—*Collected Papers*, 140-72

## INSTITUTIONAL RELIGION AND THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

This question, often put in the crucial form, "Did Jesus Christ intend to form a Church?" is well worth asking. Indeed, it is of great

and pressing importance to those who now have the spiritual reconstruction of society at heart. It means, in practice: can men best be saved, regenerated, one by one, by their direct responses to the action of the Spirit; or, is the life of the Spirit best found and actualized through submission to tradition and contacts with other men—that is, in a group or church? And if in a group or church, what should the character of this society be? But we shall make no real movement towards solving this problem, unless we abandon both the standpoint of authority, and that of naïve religious individualism; and consent to look at it as a part of the general problem of human society, in the light of history, of psychology, and of ethics.

I think we may say without exaggeration that the general modern judgment—not, of course, the clerical or orthodox judgment—is adverse to institutionalism; at least as it now exists. In spite of the enormous improvement which would certainly be visible, were we to compare the average ecclesiastical attitude and average Church service in this country with those of a hundred years ago, the sense that religion involves submission to the rules and discipline of a closed society—that definite spiritual gains are attached to spiritual incorporation—that church-going, formal and corporate worship, is a normal and necessary part of the routine of a good life: all this has certainly ceased to be general amongst us. If we include the whole population, and not the pious fraction in our view, this is true both of so-called Catholic and so-called Protestant countries. . . . Those, too, who study and care for the spiritual life seem most often to conceive it in the terms of William James' well-known definition of religion as "the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the Divine."

Such a life of the Spirit—and the majority of educated men would probably accept this description of it—seems little if at all conditioned by Church membership. . . .

The question of this institutional side of religion and what we should demand from it falls into two parts, which will best be treated separately. First, that which concerns the character and usefulness of the group-organization or society: the Church. Secondly, that which relates to its peculiar practices: the Cult. We must inquire under each head what are their necessary characters, their essential gifts to the soul, and what their dangers and limitations.

First, then, the Church. What does a Church really do for the God-desiring individual; the soul that wants to live a full, complete

and real life, which has "felt in its solitude" the presence and compulsion of Eternal Reality under one or other of the forms of religious experience?

I think we can say that the Church or institution gives to its loyal members:—

- (1) Group-consciousness.
- (2) Religious union, not only with its contemporaries but with the race, that is with history. This we may regard as an extension into the past—and so an enrichment—of the group-consciousness.
- (3) Discipline; and with discipline a sort of spiritual grit, which carries our fluctuating souls past and over the inevitably recurring periods of slackness, and corrects subjectivism.
- (4) It gives Culture, handing on the discoveries of the saints. In so far as the free-lance gets any of these four things, he gets them ultimately, though indirectly, from some institutional source....

Such an application of the institutional idea to present needs is required, in fact, to fulfil at least four primary conditions:—

(1) It must give a social life that shall develop group-consciousness in respect of our eternal interests and responsibilities: using for this real discipline, and the influences of liturgy and creed.

(2) Yet it must not so standardize and socialize this life as to leave no room for personal freedom in the realm of Spirit: for those "experiences of men in their solitude" which form the very heart of religion.

(3) It must not be so ring-fenced, so exclusive, so wholly conditioned by the past, that the voice of the future, that is of the prophet giving fresh expression to eternal truths, cannot clearly be heard in it; not only from within its own borders but also from outside. But

(4) On the other hand, it must not be so contemptuous of the past and its priceless symbols that it breaks with tradition, and so loses that very element of stability which it is its special province to preserve.

I go on now to the second aspect of institutional religion: *Cultus*.

We at once make the transition from Church to *Cultus*, when we ask ourselves: how does, how can, the Church as an organized and enduring society do its special work of the creating an atmosphere and imparting a secret? How is the traditional deposit of spiritual experience handed on, the individual drawn into the stream of spiritual history and held there? Remember, the Church exists to foster and

hand on, not merely the moral life, the life of this-world perfection; but the spiritual life in all its mystery and splendour—the life of more than this-world perfection, the poetry of goodness, the life that aims at God. And this, not only in elect souls, which might conceivably make and keep direct contacts without her help, but in greater or less degree in the mass of men, who *do* need help. How is this done? The answer can only be, that it is mostly done through symbolic acts, and by means of suggestion and imitation. . . .

Here we approach the next point. The cultus, with its liturgy and its discipline, exists for and promotes the repetition of acts which are primarily the expression of man's instinct for God; and by these—or any other repeated acts—our ductile instinctive life is given a definite trend. We know from Semon's researches that the performance of any given act by a living creature influences all future performances of similar acts. That is to say, memory combines with each fresh stimulus to control our reaction to it. "In the case of living organisms," says Bertrand Russell, "practically everything that is distinctive both of their physical and their mental behaviour is bound up with this persistent influence of the past": and most actions and responses "can only be brought under causal laws by including past occurrences in the history of the organism as part of the causes of the present response." The phenomena of apperception, in fact, form only one aspect of a general law. As that which we have perceived conditions what we can now perceive, so that which we have done conditions what we shall do. It therefore appears that in spite of angry youthful revolts or mature sophistications, early religious training, and especially repeated religious acts, are likely to influence the whole of our future lives. Though all they meant to us seems dead or unreal, they have retreated to the dark background of consciousness and there live on. The tendency which they have given persists; we never get away from them. A church may often seem to lose her children, as human parents do; but in spite of themselves they retain her invisible seal, and are her children still. In nearly all conversions in middle life, or dramatic returns from scepticism to traditional belief, a large part is undoubtedly played by forgotten childish memories and early religious discipline, surging up and contributing their part to the self's new apprehensions of Reality. . . .

If therefore the spiritual or the regenerate life is not likely to prosper without some incorporation in institutions, some definite link with the past, it seems also likely to need for its full working-out and propaganda the symbols and liturgy of a cultus. . . . The impulsive



mind is inevitably conservative; always at the mercy of memorized images. Hence its delighted self-yielding to traditional symbols, its uncritical emotionalism, its easy slip-back into traditional and even archaic and self-contradictory beliefs: the way in which it pops out and enjoys itself at a service of the hearty congregational sort, or may even lead its unresisting owner to the revivalists' penitent-bench.

But on the other hand, Creative Spirit is not merely conservative. The Lord and Giver of Life presses forward, and perpetually brings novelty to birth; and in so far as we are dedicated to Him, we must not make an unconditional surrender to psychic indolence, or to the pull-back of the religious past. We may not, as Christians, accept easy emotions in the place of heroic and difficult actualizations: make external religion an excuse for dodging reality, immerse ourselves in an exquisite dream, or tolerate any real conflict between old cultus and actual living faith. A most delicate discrimination is therefore demanded from us; the striking of a balance between the rightful conservatism of the cultus and the rightful independence of the soul.

—*The Life of the Spirit and the Life of To-day*, 120-46

## THE CROSS AND THE SACRAMENTS

It has been said that the whole life of Christ was a Cross. I think that saying does grave injustice to its richness of response, to the real expansion and joy and beauty of His contacts with nature, children, friends; the true happiness we find again in the Saints nearest to Him; the hours snatched for the deep joy of prayer and communion; the outburst of rejoicing when He discerns the Father's Will. But it was the deep happiness of the entirely self-abandoned, not the easy shallow satisfaction of those who live to express themselves and enjoy themselves; that Perfect Joy which St. Francis rediscovered in abjection; and which was ratified on La Verna when he was caught into the supernatural order and sealed with the wounds of Christ.

There is a marked contrast between the first phase of the Ministry with its confident movement within the natural world; mending what is wrong with it, using what is right in it and sharing the social life of men; and that after the Transfiguration, the second phase, with its sense of a deepening conflict with that easy, happy world; the conviction that what is deeply wrong with it can only be mended by

sacrifice; that the Suffering Servant is the one who serves His brethren best. "Take up the Cross if you wish to follow Me!" The spiritually natural life is charming but it stops short of all that God asks of the really surrendered soul.

It was in the Passion, says St. John of the Cross, that Christ "finished that supreme work which His whole life, its miracles and works of power, had not accomplished: the union and reconciliation of human nature with the life of God." Here we learn all that it means to acknowledge Him as our Way, our Truth and our Life. I suppose no soul of any sensitiveness can live through Holy Week without an awed and grateful sense of being incorporated in a mystery of self-giving love which yet remains far beyond our span.

We saw how the first movement of Christ's soul was self-donation to the purpose of the Father, already stirring in His child heart. "I must be about my Father's business"—the one rule of His life and ours. It seems the most lovely of vocations at that point. The last movement of His soul was the utter self-giving of the Cross. . . .

That is the perfection of self-oblivious love. That is the true culmination of the story that began with the Baby at Bethlehem. It is a very lopsided revelation of God that gives us the manger without the Cross—those two windows stand north and south of the Altar where Christ gives Himself eternally to men. "We are made partakers of Christ," says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews; "if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfastly to the end." The beginning is easy and lovely; it is the end that tests to the uttermost our courage and love. "Can you drink of My Cup and be baptized with My Baptism?" Not unless we care more about Him than about our own souls.

But there is the essence of the spiritual life. Profound submission to the mysterious Will of God declared in circumstance. And being what we are and the world what it is, that means for most of us Gethesemane and the Cross and the darkness of the Cross. Lots of the Saints have been through that. We don't begin to understand the Passion till we see what it was in their lives. For union with Christ means accepting the dread fact of human nature, that only those willing to accept suffering up to the limit are capable of giving love up to the limit; and that this is the kind of love which is the raw material of the redeeming life. Only those who place themselves in the hands of God without reserve and without fear are going to be used by Him to save. We want a lot of practice before we can manage this. It will not come out of an easy-going religion.

To look at the Crucifix—"the supreme symbol of our august religion"—and then to look at our own hearts; to test by the Cross the quality of our love—if we do that honestly and unflinchingly we don't need any other self-examination than that, any other judgment or purgation. The lash, the crown of thorns, the mockery, the stripping, the nails—life has equivalents of all these for us and God asks a love for Himself and His children which can accept and survive all that in the particular way in which it is offered to us. It is no use to talk in a large vague way about the love of God; *here* is its point of insertion in the world of men.

What about the dreadful moment when a great test of courage, great suffering, a great bereavement faced us and we knew we were for it and found the agony was more than we could face? The revelation that someone we trusted could not be trusted any more, that someone loved profit better than they loved us? How do we feel when we have to suffer for someone else's wrongdoing? How do we bear mockery and contempt, especially if it is directed at our religious life or at the unfortunate discrepancy between our religious life and our character? What about the sting, the lash, of humiliation or disappointment, the unfortunate events that stripped us of the seamless drapery of self-respect and convention and left us naked to the world; the wounds given by those we loved best; the loneliness inseparable from some phase of the spiritual life? All this happens over and over again. Can we weave it all into the sacrifice of love?

Here again Christ does not go outside our ordinary condition. He hallows real life. Can we hallow it? Can we bear to let the light of the window fall on our little fears, humiliations and pains and endure the chemical rays which can transform them into part of His sacrifice? Can we weave all that into the sacrifice of love, and what are we going to do with it if we can't? Our world is chaos without the Cross; for we never understand suffering until we have embraced it, turned it into sacrifice and given ourselves in it to God. After that we can say with the poet Claudel, "No more sin without God, no more crosses without Christ," and know that the Crucifix and the Eucharist are two aspects of one mystery. . . .

Then we look up at the Crucifix from which all these draw power and love; to Him to whom they have given their lives and who gave them their mandate, whose agents they are, the Saint of Saints.

—*Light of Christ*, 79-86

## VALUE OF THE SACRAMENTS

A symbol is a signifiant image, which helps the worshipping soul to apprehend spiritual reality. A sacrament is a significant deed, a particular use of temporal things, which gives to them the value of eternal things and thus incorporates and conveys spiritual reality. Hence sacraments involve an incarnational philosophy; a belief that the Supernatural draws near to man in and through the natural. It is true that the distinction between the symbolic and sacramental aspects of cultus is not absolute. All sacraments do and must employ symbolic methods. Symbols and symbolic acts easily acquire a sacramental character—e.g. the use of holy water, or objects and images which have been specially blessed—since being charged with religious suggestion, devout minds find in and through them a genuine contact with the Divine. Christian tradition is justified in creating a class of "sacramentals," which are more than symbols and less than sacraments: efficacious signs, which when taken into the atmosphere of worship become means by which the successive creature lays hold on the Unchanging. Indeed, many of the common things and acts of daily existence can be given such sacramental quality, by the Godward intention of those who are accustomed to seek and find the Eternal in the temporal; and so woven into the fabric of the worshipping life.

Generally speaking, however, it is true to say that from the point of view of cultus, symbols represent and suggest, whilst sacraments work. Effective action is essential to them; and this action is from God to man, not from man to God. The water cleanses, the bread and wine feed, the oil anoints, the imposition of consecrating hands conveys new character, the marriage act unites; and all this in the interior and spiritual as well as in the exterior and natural sense. Such interior and spiritual action cannot be achieved by man. His part, as worshipper, consists in the preparation; the adoring and confident reference to God, opening up a pathway for His grace. But the essence of the sacramental action consists in the "actual conveyance of spiritual meaning and power by a material process . . . not only God's meaning to the mind, but God Himself to the whole person of the worshipper."

A valid sacrament, therefore, always leaves the situation different from what it was before. By means of the natural needs and actions of men, it effects a communication of the Wholly Other, over against

men; and it is a fundamental part of worship, because it is an acknowledgement of the presence and priority of the Divine, and is directed towards the sanctification of life. This is already seen in embryo, in those primitive rites of initiation and transition, those sacred meals and purifications which Dr. Marett has well named the "Sacraments of Simple Folk." Here we first find men becoming aware of the mysterious significance of life, and their own dependence on the Unseen: and reaching out towards it through and in those very facts and compulsions of natural existence, which they feel to be the channels of a non-natural Power from beyond themselves.

Thus we may say in a general sense, that sacraments convey the numinous, establish a relation between human and Divine, more precisely and more effectively than the most august of symbols; for their contact with our life is more complete. This conveyance is achieved by means of tokens; objects or actions set apart for a special office, and therefore taking rank as effective instruments. These tokens constitute a sacred currency which not only signifies but also conveys to those who take it seriously the wealth for which it stands. Like any other coinage, it may and often does become debased: yet still it is representative of the spiritual gold. Moreover, the obvious inadequacy and arbitrary character of the token over against the holy reality which comes by these humble channels to transform, refresh, and sanctify the life of men, once more reminds us of the freedom and priority of God's action; the homely plane on which human worship must be content to move. It checks presumption and keeps adoring gratitude alive.

Thus sacramentalism, emerging as a primary means of worship appropriate to the nature and situation of man, grows and deepens with our growth. It has something to give the most naïve of primitives; its possibilities have never been exhausted by the most supernaturalized of Saints. For it reveals God, the Supernatural, ever at work seeking and finding us through the natural; the objects and actions of our temporal experience, as the effective means of our deepest and most transforming apprehensions of Eternity, and our most insistent invitations to worship coming to us where we are, and taking us as we are—creatures of soul and body, conditioned by time and space. Therefore the cultus which excludes sacraments does not in consequence draw nearer to God; but renounces a sovereign means by which He is self-imparted to us, and in and through which His action may be recognized and adored. It is true that sacramental methods are always open to the dangers of formalism and exteriorization, and

may even slide down into a crass materialism. Yet on the other hand, it is those who have reached out through the sensible to an apprehension of the supra-sensible, who realize most fully the deep mystery and unexhausted possibilities which abide in the world of sense, and therefore its power of conveying to us that which lies beyond, and gives to it significance and worth. . . .

Thus some form or degree of sacramentalism must enter into human worship: whether of the diffuse and generalized kind which "finds the inward in the outward," or of the more definite sort which embodies sacred mysteries and divine communications in specific acts. In it we first see clearly man's deep instinct for the supernatural, his realization of "one thing working in another thing," spirit giving significance to sense. For the universality of sacraments is not, as is sometimes thought, a witness to the Divine Immanence. It is rather a proclamation of the Divine Transcendence; man's realization of the gap between Creator and creature—a certain tragic disharmony—and the need of a bridge, an ordained path along which the Eternal Perfect may penetrate Time and the things of Time. Here man is pressed by God immanent to prepare the matrix; but it is God transcendent Who pours into it His quickening love to cleanse, feed, and transform. In the genuine sacrament, this action and this penetration must be so complete, so entirely independent of the worshipper's uneven religious sensibility, that here men can be sure of laying hold of a spiritual reality truly present in its own right; awaiting their recognition, but in no way conditioned by it. In other words, it must be effective *ex opere operato* if it is to meet the creature's deepest need.

It is plain that such a religion as Christianity, which has for its object the worship of the Divine self-revealed in history, the Logos incarnate in time and space—which seeks and finds God self-given, in and through the littleness of the manger, and the shamefulness of the cross—is closely bound up with a sacramental interpretation of life. Christ, as Bérulle said so deeply and so boldly, is "Himself the major sacrament"; the visible sign of the nature of the Eternal God, and the medium of that Eternal God's self-giving to men. And the Church, as His Mystical Body, the organ of His continued presence, lives with a sacramental life from which the reality and power of the specific Christian sacraments proceed, and which indeed gives to them their credentials.

—Worship, 42-47

## PREPARATION FOR THE COMMUNION THROUGH LITURGY

The Christian Liturgy, the common prayer of the family of Christ, is a twofold act of worship. We distort its character and give at best an impoverished adoration if we forget this, and find all the significance of the service in the Communion with which it ends. Each of its two movements mounts to a crisis, which corresponds with one of the two supreme self-disclosures of God to man. The first culminates in the solemn reading of the Gospel. There the Living Christ, God's uttered Word within history, speaks to His Church, and His saving and sacrificial action in time and in eternity is brought to mind. The second culminates in the great Eucharistic sacrifice of oblation, thanksgiving and communion. Here that Church presents before God the sacred mystery of this ceaseless sacrificial action, the abiding Presence of the Incarnate is made known to the worshipping soul, and the food of Eternal Life is received in the breaking of bread. Thus, through word and ritual act, all the needs and capacities of man's mixed nature—mind and will, sense and spirit—are met and fulfilled by the Divine Charity; and are given their opportunity of adoring response.

These two phases of the Liturgy should never be separated in our thoughts. They represent the completing aspects of one single revelation of the Eternal, made in history and continued in the living Church; and within this, that Church's twofold vocation, on one hand as the teacher and feeder of souls, and on the other as presenting before God the oblation of man's sacrificial prayer. By both these channels—Gospel and Sacrament, Word and Act—not by one alone, the Supernatural enters our natural experience, to purify and transform. For both Gospel and Sacrament the Christian in the Eucharist gives thanks; and by both the Church, and each soul within the Church, is led out towards one imageless Reality. So first in the Liturgy of the Word, the family prayer of the faithful, with its successive notes of penitence, of worship and of supplication, its close hold upon Scripture, the Teaching Church instructs her children; brings them to the frontiers of the Supernatural, and prepares each worshipping soul for the solemn disclosure of that Supernatural Order in the life and death of the Incarnate Word. These serial acts of devotion effect levels of religion, quiet the uneasy mind, unself the will, adjust the soul of mystery, and remind it of mystery's price.

Every Eucharist is a fresh act, a fresh declaration of love, freshly conditioned by the particular responses of the souls given to its movement: each of whom has an irreplaceable part to fill in the Church's total prayer. It is a new picture of the encounter of Divine and human charity; a work of art which always remains within the great tradition, yet bears its own witness to the impact of the Heavenly Beauty on each praying soul, with the variation occasioned by the individual and corporate response of these souls. . . .

Standing as it were on the threshold of the sanctuary, we stress our creaturely weakness, our shame and confusion of face; make our contrite appeal to the mercy and generosity of the Invisible. *Kyrie eleison!* Lord have mercy! What else can the little creature say? Woe is me! because I am a man of unclean lips. It is only in reliance on the Divine Charity that the soul dares to go forward; so awful is the region on which we enter, when we draw near to the altar of that self-giving Life which gives joy to our youth.

So the priest, in the antique Liturgy of St. James:

"Master, Lord, and God, reject me not utterly though stained by the multitude of my sins: for behold! I approach to this, thy divine and heavenly mystery. Not as one worthy, but looking only to thy goodness, I lift up my voice unto thee."

It is at this point that the Eastern Church chants the Beatitudes, reminding the soul of the classic standard from which it has declined, and to which the Liturgy recalls it: that blessed state of meekness, mercy, purity and peace which is proper to the children of God, the inheritors of heaven. The English Church links the people's litany of penitence and supplication with the more menacing Commandments of the ancient law: but whether he thinks of his moral obligation as a prohibition or a demand, the Christian cannot elude ethics on his way towards the sanctuary of God. Over against the contrite acknowledgment of our own faultiness, our ingrained egotism and turbulent desires, the Church sets the acknowledgment of our responsibility, and the bracing appeal to the moral will. Humility does not mean an easy acquiescence in our own shabbiness. The human nature which is to be offered at the altar for God's purpose must be ordered and purified, in so far as man is able to do it. He must at least set his life in order as well as he can, submit thought, word and deed to the judgment of Love before he goes further. "Let a man examine himself," says St. Paul to those who come to the Christian mysteries. Not as to whether he is good enough, for this question is not worth asking; but as to whether he is willing to take trouble



enough, whether his face is set towards Eternity, and whether the demands and interests of the Eternal are given priority over the demands and interests of self-will. Self-conquest in its most realistic and costly form is asked of the Christian communicant. A purely mystical religion, leaving the sense-world and its conflicts behind in its flight towards God, might elude all this; but an incarnational religion never can. It must unify and carry forward humanity in its wholeness, in its approach to the altar of God.

It is true that in the deepest sense the purifying of the springs of conduct is something which can only be effected by the secret action of God; purging and transfiguring self-centred desire in the flame of disinterested love. "Thou hast laid on me the spell of desire, O Christ. Thou hast changed me with thy divine love. Burn up my sin in thy fire!" says the Orthodox worshipper. So the beautiful Greek antiphon which forms the Anglican prayer of preparation—"Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known"—declares the primal truth which rules the Liturgy. It subdues the soul to the divine besetting action, opens the doors of the mind to the supernatural, and demands a cleansing which involves every aspect of our nature, and a worship which is expressed in the loving oblation of all that we have and are; nevertheless God, by whom all things are being made, is the real doer of all that is here done. Therefore it is that the three primary obligations of the Christian, conduct, creed and prayer—to do, to believe and to adore in accordance with the mind of the Church—can never be separated in practice; and the preparation of the Eucharist drives this home. For the object of that preparation is not mere self-improvement for its own sake; but a restoration, a readjustment of the moral, intellectual and spiritual nature of man, which shall fit it for the real purpose of all life, the perfect hallowing of the Name of God.

In so far as the individual soul is concerned, this preparation for the supernatural, this gradual training in the art of sacrificial love, is given above all in and through the common life. In the liturgical preparation for the Eucharist we are never far from that common life; with its tensions, needs and obligations, its constant humbling reminders of our creaturely state. Here it is that we are first to learn to know ourselves, our fragility and our capacity; and then to realize our situation in the sight of that God, unto whom all hearts—shut to each other's scrutiny and often to their own—are open, and who knows humanity, with its confusions, inconsistencies and conflicts, better than it can ever know itself. . . .

When once its situation is thus realized, the prayer of the soul is no longer either for comfort or for enlightenment, but only for cleansing. The creature brings its tangled longings and secret tendencies and terrors, its dark corners and its stains—the things it will hardly acknowledge to itself, the ignoble possibilities kept under lock and key—and asks for the purifying action of the Divine Love, from whom no secrets are hid. And at once we are reminded that, moving about the visible world as ring-fenced persons, jealously guarding the real secret of our hearts, at another level of being we are transparent spirits; every impulse, movement and resistance wholly present to God, whose contact with those spirits is perfect in its delicacy and penetrating completeness. It is not to a God far off, but to our closest companion and the one unfailing redeemer of our loneliness, that we appeal for the cleansing of our cloudy thoughts by the action of the Divine Charity; that so we may enter the solemn movement of the Christian liturgic life. "What is a man but his thoughts and his loves?" says St. Augustine, for indeed it is by these that his action is determined and his freedom is expressed. And what is the Praying Church but the thoughts and the loves of Christ and all His Christians, set on the worship of God and the rescue of souls. . . .

Passing from penitence through deepening prayer to meditation, the mind is now subdued to the attentive listening to those first teachers of the Church who interpreted the mystery of her being; and through whom she still instructs her children in the living out of that supernatural life to which they are called. The centuries are obliterated as we hear the undying counsels of Paul and John, Peter and James. Thus we are reminded that this supernatural life, which is in fact the life of Christ in His Christians, and of each Christian in Christ, is unchanging in its standards and obligations; and therefore that the common law of the Household of Faith is still the royal law of the Apostles and the Saints.

So, stage by stage, the Church develops her liturgic action, and brings us at last to the high point in her ritual of preparation: that solemn reading of the Gospel in which the worshippers are confronted by the awful realism of Christ. Here the Supernatural meets us, disclosed in the degree in which we can bear it, by human acts and human words. We pass from the mysterious life and ordered discipline of the Church to more mysterious contact with the mind and heart of the Incarnate, whose unaging Spirit indwells that Church; and who comes forth again and again in His changeless Gospel, as in His earthly ministry, to teach men the secrets of Reality, to enlighten,

## CHRIST, THE CHURCH, AND THE SACRAMENTS

heal and redeem. Here the Divine Charity moves out towards man, that man may be incited to move towards God.

—*The Mystery of Sacrifice*, 1-13

## CHRIST IN THE HOLY COMMUNION

November 6, 1928

Yes, I agree with you, that Christ gives Himself eternally—that is, through His self-giving God comes into the soul whether we know it or not. Holy Communion is one of the great ways we actualize this and also give *ourselves* in our turn, to be used in the Divine work of redeeming the world.

These modernists are very useful in translating religious truth into current language, broadening the basis of faith, etc., but they are curiously deficient it seems to me in simplicity.

I think the old woman who could in the Sacrament realize "my Jesus" was spiritually far in advance of the theologians who argue about it.

I do hope you are better again and back with your children. I had to address a big meeting of S.S. teachers the other day! such nice young things. I talked mostly about sheep-dogs!

—*Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, 182

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*In the alphabetical list of important ideas and persons found in this book, common concepts which appear on almost every page are obviously omitted—those such as God, mysticism, prayer, worship, and many of the disciplines for devotional living. Where these words appear in this Index, it is for a special significance.—T.S.K.*

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